Witches write history: remembering the Old Religion and constructing a “historical imaginary”

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Contemporary Goddess worship (also known as feminist witchcraft\(^1\)) is a small but expanding neo-Pagan spiritual path. Practitioners believe in an immanent female deity (the Goddess), they consider the earth to be sacred, and they celebrate the female body and its cycles. As a result, the religion is woman- and nature-centred. Goddess worship emerged from the broader counter-cultural milieu of the 1960s and 70s. Writers of Goddess texts (referred to as Goddess writers) conceptualise their movement’s origins in prehistoric, pre-patriarchal times, with the advent of patriarchal polytheistic and monotheistic religions signifying a “fall”. During this imagined period, formerly peaceful, civilised, matricentric societies became hierarchical, violent, and patriarchal. Vestiges of the pre-patriarchal Goddess religion, however, managed to survive underground for millennia until the atrocities of the early modern European witchcraft persecutions. In recent decades the Goddess has been awakened from dormancy and the Goddess religion is (re)emerging. It is this narrative, from prehistory through to the present and future, that is the focus of this study.

This thesis furthers academic scholarship on contemporary Goddess worship by presenting a perspective from the history of ideas in which the Goddess writers’ construction of the past is examined for its meaning and purpose. Focusing on three myth-historical time periods, which are termed the “Golden Age”, the “Fall” and the Goddess “Renaissance”, the Goddess writers’ overall narrative is viewed as a “mythistory”. It is elucidated in relation to the twin themes of gender and ecology – that is, in regard to the emphases placed on women and nature.

The underlying argument of this thesis is that history is fundamental to Goddess worship. Engagement with the past occurs through written texts, archaeological artefacts, pilgrimages to sacred sites, seasonal festivals and viewing/producing art. Goddess writers’ conceptualisation of the past provides devotees with origins, authority, meaning, inspiration, and identity. Understanding the Goddess writers’ construction of the past is essential to understanding this new movement.

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\(^1\) As the term “feminist witchcraft” is used to refer to Goddess worship, the term “witches” is commonly employed by Goddess writers to refer to Goddess worshippers.
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In the first year of my PhD my friend Clayton died after a long struggle with Cystic Fibrosis. I dedicate this thesis to him.
Chapter One: Introduction

The altar is covered in candles, flowers, incense, and precious personal belongings; its focus – a white, ceramic figurine with large breasts and a wholesome belly – is a reproduction of an ancient Goddess image. Women make final touches, stoke the fire and wait patiently for latecomers who are lost, have been deterred by the stormy weather, or hesitate outside the fragile tee-pee.

Finally it is time to acknowledge and celebrate the winter solstice.

A circle is cast around the open fire. Auras are smudged and consecrated with the smoke from a bunch of burning dried sage stems. Candles are lit ceremoniously and aspects of the Goddess formally invoked. A young woman inducts her coven members with a prayer and anoints them with a dab of essential oil to the forehead. The candle, protected in the cavernous space of the Goddess’s belly, flickers light throughout. A sacred space has been created and the mood is solemn.

What follows is an intense few hours. The women contemplate and accept their dark times. Requests are made of the Goddess to assist the women in their endeavours and to help their male kin, oblivious victims of that monster creation, the “patriarchy”. In an atmosphere of support, comfort and understanding, women purify their minds and souls as their personal concerns flow freely. They welcome the increasing lightness of the days and celebrate the accompanying life-giving force of mother nature, expected in the ensuing months. Emotions run high. The crescendo of singing, drumming and chanting climaxes as energies unite in ecstasy, spiralling the healing cone of power towards the sky. The women are released. The intensity dissipates and the circle is formally opened.

It is now a social time to reflect on the evening, on daily routines, and to enjoy some bread and cheese. Jokes are made as the women imagine that the Catholics, who are within earshot at a weekend retreat for marriage counselling, are calling them devil-worshippers. They are intrigued and impressed when leaving the tee-pee to find that the wind, clouds, thunder and lightning have been replaced with a calm, star-filled night.

World-wide, small groups of women meet regularly for rituals like that described above, which occurred in bush land near Fremantle, Western Australia. They celebrate full moons, acknowledge dark moons and participate in Pagan festivities. While there may well be a decline in mainstream religions in the western world, perusing the “Body, Mind, and Spirit” sections of bookshops and surfing the net for “cyberspace spirituality” indicates no lack of interest in spiritual matters. New Age gift shops are stocked with spells, rune stones, crystals, Celtic jewellery and literature on alternative

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1 This is my description of a ritual that I attended in 1996.
2 Throughout this thesis double quotation marks will be used to signify that a term is specialised language or is being discussed. Single quotation marks will be used to signify a quoted phrase or passage. With regard to spelling, Australian/British English will be used except for quotations where spelling will appear exactly as it does in the original, which, as is often the case, may be in American English.
spiritualities. Whether because of increased dissatisfaction with the way the world is faring ecologically, spiritually and socially, or due to disillusionment with mainstream religions, new religious and spiritual movements are gaining popularity in North America, Europe and the Antipodes. Neo-Paganism is one such movement. It is purportedly based on nature worship, pre-Christian folk customs and ancient indigenous traditions. In its contemporary form Paganism consists of several spiritual paths including ‘Wicca, Druidry, Shamanism, Goddess Spirituality, Sacred Ecology, Heathenism and various Magical Groups’. It is one of the growing neo-Pagan strands, Goddess worship, which will be the focus of this thesis.

The counter-cultural and politically radical climate of the 1960s and 1970s provided ‘the sociocultural backdrop’ for ‘a widespread explosion of interest in new religions.’ Contemporary Goddess worship is one such result of the complex and serendipitous cross-fertilisation that occurred between the women’s liberation movement (both spiritually- and politically-focused feminisms), neo-Paganism (particularly Wicca), and the environmental movement. Central to (re)creating a religion with a feminine dimension has been the need to challenge an androcentric, progressive history, which presumes the universal and innate subordination of women and the earth. Many Goddess worshippers believe or find inspiration, truth or authority in a woman-empowering and nature-focused account of the past. In this particular construction, prehistoric societies are presented as being woman- and earth-centred. It follows that, due to the perceived gentle, nurturing nature of women and their affinity with mother earth, life was harmonious; love and peace prevailed. In the Goddess writers’ representation, this lifestyle was disturbed from around 4400 BC when warmongering Kurgan tribes overthrew matrifocal societies, subordinating women for the ensuing several thousand years. Non-hierarchical, women-centred, earth-based spirituality was replaced with patriarchal Pagan pantheons in which the male sky gods enjoyed primacy. Centuries later these classical pantheons were replaced by patriarchal monotheistic religions. Remnants of the former society, however, are believed to have survived in secret covens that existed underground during the Middle Ages, through witchcraft and

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folk tales. In the Goddess writers’ construction, despite their resilience, the survivors’ descendants were unable to survive underground indefinitely; the final cruel blow was suffered in the early modern witch persecutions (the so-called “Burning Times”). Goddess writers allege that nine million witches were killed in what is frequently referred to, in Goddess literature, as a “holocaust”. The present, on the other hand, is presented as a promising era in which Goddess-oriented movements are emerging from hiding, prefiguring a utopian future.

The late British activist, writer, teacher and Goddess devotee Asphodel Long claimed that spiritual feminism is at the centre of today’s confrontation of ideas. This new philosophy, Long contended, challenges, for instance, Frances Fukuyama’s declaration of the “end of history”. Fukuyama argued that the collapse of communism signalled the “end of history” in the sense that humans had reached the end of evolution (ideologically); that is, the clash of ideas was now over and western liberal democracy and capitalism had become universal. In contrast, Long believed that spiritual feminism continued the task of challenging established philosophies and practices of the west, as Socialism and Communism had attempted to do unsuccessfully throughout the Cold War. Moreover, Long implies that spiritual feminism is more likely to achieve change because, unlike Socialism and Communism, it does not neglect the spiritual dimension.

10 Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, pp. 3–18. Fukuyama claims that ‘[t]he passing of Marxism-Leninism first from China and then from the Soviet Union will mean its death as a living ideology of world historical significance.’ Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, p. 18. Fukuyama is not claiming that all societies will become successful liberal societies at the end of history, but ‘merely that they end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of human society.’ Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, p. 13. Since the Iraq war Fukuyama has distanced himself from US President Bush and other Neoconservatives, but he continues to support his “end of history” proposal. He does not, for instance, believe that radical Islam is a serious alternative ideology that would challenge liberal democracy. He has not, however, commented on neo-Paganism. See Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, Profile Books, London, 2006.
To Goddess worshippers, their religion is perceived to be the answer to many contemporary crises and the Goddess bears relevance to almost any situation. The holistic, all-encompassing nature of the movement means that in theory this world-view caters for every contemporary problem from pollution to patriarchy, from the spiritual void of atheistic humanism to the alleged misogyny of the Christian and Jewish traditions. Its sensitivity towards women, the environment and “others” allays the current maladies of sexism, ecological ruin and racism. The non-hierarchical, polytheistic and pantheistic nature of Goddess worship is perceived as eliminating all vestiges of dominance, oppression and exploitation, as welcoming minority groups and as catering for multiculturalism. Furthermore, the Goddess movement’s version of its origins (the “Golden Age” of matricentric societies, followed by a “Fall” – the patriarchal take-over, which is in turn followed by the contemporary Goddess “Renaissance”) could conceivably provide security and identity in the new millennium and hope for the future. It is this particular understanding of history that will be examined in this thesis.

The study of contemporary Paganism is relatively new in academia. The first conference concerned solely with “Paganism in contemporary Britain”, for instance, was held at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1994. It drew together academics from university departments of sociology, anthropology, religious studies and history, as well as practitioners from the Pagan community.

Publications in the field of Goddess worship can be divided into three categories. The first consists of scholarly research that has tended to question and/or discredit Goddess writers’ representation of the past. The second category of publications is academic studies that describe the types of people involved in neo-Paganism, illuminate their

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13 This extremely positive image of Goddess worship is generally reflected in the broader movement of Paganism, with the exception, however, of a subset of the Odinist strand, which has revived neo-Nazi racist ideas and practices. Helen A. Berger, “Witchcraft and Neopaganism,” in Helen A. Berger (ed.), Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2005, p. 45.

14 The claim that Goddess worship caters for multiculturalism or difference is questionable. In the process of adopting practices from indigenous and ethnic cultures, Pagans may actually be involved in the appropriation of culture.

15 This extremely positive image of Goddess worship is generally reflected in the broader movement of Paganism, with the exception, however, of a subset of the Odinist strand, which has revived neo-Nazi racist ideas and practices. Helen A. Berger, “Witchcraft and Neopaganism,” in Helen A. Berger (ed.), Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2005, p. 45.

16 Kathy Ferguson observed that that what she referred to as “Cosmic Feminism” (Goddess worship, witchcraft, Native American traditions) “is usually accorded scant attention within the academy.” Kathy E. Ferguson, The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p. 97.

beliefs and practices, and examine the leading figures. The third category comprises non-fiction by practitioners of Goddess worship, in which they describe their beliefs, rituals, practices, and origins.

The first category consists of scholars who have predominantly been concerned with Goddess writers' historical and archaeological accuracy as well as with their interpretations of archaeological artefacts.\(^\text{18}\) Examples include studies by Lynn Meskell, Gerder Lerner, Helene Foley, Sally Binford, Mary Lefkowitz, Joan Townsend, Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris.\(^\text{19}\) The result of some of these publications has been to undermine dialogue between practitioners and scholars.\(^\text{20}\)

The second category of scholars describe and seek to understand neo-Pagan paths. This type of research has mainly been undertaken by anthropologists, sociologists and scholars of religious studies,\(^\text{21}\) such as Margot Adler, Helen Berger, Tanya Luhrmann, Graham Harvey, Kathryn Rountree, and Lynne Hume.\(^\text{22}\) Margot Adler's publication in

\(^{18}\) See Appendix A for examples of criticisms from this first category of scholarly work.


\(^{21}\) In his assessment of scholarly work in the field Ronald Hutton has observed that ‘academic interest in modern paganism is only just starting to develop, and is so far confined mainly to disciplines such as religious studies, anthropology and sociology, with very little input from historians. ... the pioneering work in the field has ... been carried out by people who are pagans themselves, existing outside the academy or on its fringe.’ Ronald Hutton, ‘Paganism and Polemic: The Debate over the Origins of Modern Pagan Witchcraft,’ *Folklore*, vol. 111, no. 1, 2000, p. 115.

\(^{22}\) I am including Margot Adler in this category even though she does not hold an academic position. Her study comes from a sociological perspective and is influenced by her tertiary education and postgraduate studies. Adler is a journalist and Wiccan priestess. While not an expert in Pagan Studies, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz is also worth mentioning for his useful article, ‘Witches of the West: Neopaganism and
1979 provided a thorough introductory text to contemporary Paganism in the USA. Based on extensive surveys, interviews and fieldwork, Helen Berger’s study, *A Community of Witches*, is another invaluable study. Berger provides information about the development and practice of Wicca in the USA. Most interesting is her assertion that Wicca can be placed firmly within the Enlightenment tradition as a modern, rather than postmodern, religion. Tania Luhrmann’s anthropological study of magic in late twentieth-century London investigates how people come to believe in witchcraft. On the one hand, this work has received high praise in scholarly circles. On the other hand, practitioners feel betrayed by her abandonment of the subject for new scholarly projects. The sociologist Graham Harvey has published prolifically on Paganism and more broadly than the aforementioned scholars, who have tended to focus more specifically on the feminist witchcraft/Goddess-worshipping or Wiccan paths. Harvey takes a phenomenological approach and, as a result, his books are usefully descriptive, providing detailed background information on various strands within...
Paganism. In her anthropological study of feminist witches in New Zealand, Kathryn Rountree aimed to ‘discover and understand feminist witches’ beliefs, values and ritual practices and the reasons why women find them attractive and compelling.’ The anthropologist Lynne Hume’s book *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia* includes an excellent chapter on the historical background to contemporary Paganism. Some of these scholars are also practitioners. In general, they have been involved in participant observation and/or have used surveys and questionnaires. The early descriptive scholarly work has been necessary in the formative stages of a new area of academic interest in order to establish the field. Scholarly examination of different forms of Paganism, classification of its main features, and debates over its terminology provide firm ground upon which to forge deeper into the area. The succeeding scholarly examinations have predominantly focused on understanding practitioners’ spiritual experiences and their practices of magic and ritual. This second category of publications forms the main secondary sources for this project.

Furthermore, two other scholars, the British historian Ronald Hutton and the scholar of religious studies Cynthia Eller, do not fit neatly into either of the two categories of academics specified, but they need to be acknowledged for their contributions to the field. Firstly, Ronald Hutton has written prolifically on the history of British Paganism. Hutton merges into the first category in the way that he discredits the Goddess writers’ understanding of the history of witchcraft but he also fits into the second category because he does not dismiss the movement because of historical inaccuracies — he acknowledges its benefits. Secondly, Cynthia Eller’s early work, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, fits into the second category of academics. Through ethnographic research and interviews Eller considers the types of women involved and the benefits

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they find in the movement. In contrast, less than a decade later Eller can be seen to fit into the first category of academics by the way that she focuses on Goddess worshippers’ mis-representation of the past in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory.* Eller’s book was controversial and lead to heated debate, not because it was a new perspective, but because she had previously appeared empathetic to the movement and her criticism was seen as a betrayal. Eller’s early work, however, is useful for her observations about why practitioners are attracted to the movement. In addition, like most scholars in this field, Eller outlines the practitioners’ narrative of the past, which is an invaluable contribution from which this thesis embarks. This project, however, differs markedly from Eller and the aforementioned anthropological and religious studies scholars (that is, the second category of academics) in its methodology, which is historiographical rather than ethnographical.

The third category of publications in the field of Goddess worship includes books and articles by practitioners in which they describe their religion, their beliefs, rituals, history and myths. Followers of Goddess worship tend to derive their ideas from books written by this group of devotees, who are often also feminist scholars, or have come from an academic background. Starhawk, Carol Christ, Gloria Orenstein, Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler, Charlene Spretnak, Elinor Gadon, Naomi Goldenberg, Merlin Stone, Diane Stein, Zsuzsanna Budapest, Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor are among the most popular writers. They have been influenced and inspired by each other.

35 Rountree, *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess,* pp. 5, 68; See also Appendix A of this thesis.
Orenstein, a professor of comparative literature and gender studies at the University of Southern California, for instance, cites the research of Merlin Stone, an art historian and sculptor, and of the feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas in their attempts to prove the existence of pre-patriarchal Goddess worshipping societies. She also acknowledges the inspiration her ritual groups have received from the writings of Starhawk, Zsuzsanna Budapest and Merlin Stone. It is this category of non-fiction Goddess literature that will provide the primary sources for this thesis. Throughout the thesis this group is referred to as Goddess writers. While Goddess spirituality does exist in non-English speaking countries, the influential texts and formative ideas have arisen within the USA and Great Britain. The primary sources, therefore, will be confined to the English language.

39 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 106.
41 Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris describe this body of literature as consisting of '[a] stream of books by non-specialists, artists, psychotherapists, feminists and amateur historians [that] has drawn attention to powerful and often neglected ancient images of the female. These many voices have together been termed the “Goddess movement”.' Goodison and Morris, 'Introduction. Exploring Female Divinity,' p. 6.
42 It is interesting that while many of the key ideas have come from the USA and Great Britain, some of those heavily involved in the movement have non-Anglo backgrounds. Marija Gimbutas, for instance comes from Lithuania, Z. Budapest is from Hungary and Monica Sjöö grew up in Sweden.
43 The lists of writers in the three categories are not exhaustive. Names not mentioned here may appear throughout the thesis, but these are the main writers and scholars who will be considered. Many of the primary sources were written during the late 1970s and 1980s. As Dennis Carpenter points out, there was...
I aim to explore contemporary Goddess worship from the perspective of the history of ideas. Like the first category of writers, I am interested in the Goddess writers’ representation of history. Unlike them, however, I am not concerned with discerning historical/archaeological inaccuracies. Like the second category of scholars, I am interested in Goddess writers’ understandings of the Goddess and their worldview. Unlike most scholars in the second category, I am not approaching the topic from an anthropological perspective through participating in fieldwork or conducting surveys. While such information is invaluable to this project, I focus particularly on the neglected area of historiography. My contribution to the field is to elucidate, synthesise and analyse Goddess writers’ construction of the past. I contend that the Goddess version of the past does not fit into the western tradition of “Rankean” objective history. Given this premise, I view the Goddess construction as a “mythistory” or a “historical imaginary”. I am studying, therefore, the historiography of a “mythistory”. A constant endeavour throughout the project is to consider how Goddess writers conceptualise the past, use the past, and gather meaning from the past. My underlying argument is that a notion of the past is crucial to Goddess worship.

This introductory chapter will commence by outlining the project’s methodology. It will then describe the main tenets and practices of contemporary Goddess worship and, in the process, define and clarify ambiguous terms. Thirdly, it will provide a historical background to enable an understanding of the conditions that have seen alternative spiritualities emerge throughout recent history. In particular, this discussion will stress the precursors that have influenced the development of contemporary Goddess worship. Tracing the unfolding of contemporary Goddess worship will assist in situating it within the broader movement of neo-Paganism and in seeing how influences from domains such as feminism and Witchcraft were instrumental in crafting its contemporary form.

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44 When striking differences between the Goddess perspective of the past and that of conventional history do arise, I will be seeking to understand how such a difference in their narrative serves their movement.
45 Anthropologists and scholars of religious studies, such as Cynthia Eller, discuss the same Goddess writers as I do and focus on similar themes, such as gender and ecology. This project, however, differs from Eller and other scholars in its historiographical method, which is textual-based, situates each Goddess writer in context, and, most importantly, traces inter-textual references between the Goddess writers.
46 It will become clear in the next section that these terms are in no way intended to dismiss the movement as being based on the “unreal” or “untruths”. 
I. Methodology

This project involves the presentation and analysis of a movement’s version of the past and of its perceived origins. The central argument of this thesis is that an imagined past is fundamental to contemporary Goddess worship. A particular narrative, which most Goddess writers hold to be historically true, will be shown to underlie their purpose, rationale, identity and agenda. I will demonstrate how their version of history, or origin story, permeates their myths, rituals, and symbols and enables them to connect with their deity and imagined former periods, which are full of inspiration and exemplars that empower writers to imagine a more positive future. This study is not an attempt to write a so-called objective history, nor an endeavour to prove truth or falsehood, as is often the case in this contentious field. While such an exercise is worthwhile, it impedes the search for meaning. The purpose of this thesis is to elucidate, synthesise and analyse the Goddess writers’ construction, and in the process examine the intersections between Goddess worship and the identity politics of feminism and ecology. It will become evident that the new grand narrative of Goddess worship undermines the theories of postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard who claim that we live in an age of ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’.47

I approach this project as a historian and from a position outside of the movement. Acknowledging that I am an outsider, I believe, nonetheless, that a hermeneutical approach is crucial to honouring the Goddess writers’ viewpoints. I am, in fact, aiming to reconstruct the Goddess writers’ constructions of the past from their perspective ‘with an attitude of empathy which excludes personal biases as far as possible.’48 As well as analysing the historiography of Goddess literature, I will be performing an internal critique, analysing and interpreting the writers’ versions of the past, and highlighting their differences, inconsistencies, and the models they use.49 This methodological section will commence by describing some terms that will be employed as tools for understanding Goddess writers’ conceptualisation of the past. It will be followed by an illustration of Goddess writers’ attitudes to history.

47 Jean-François Lyotard’s phrase is referred to in Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary, 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1997, p. 27. Refer to Connor, Postmodernist Culture, pp. 23–43, for a discussion of Jean-François Lyotard’s account of postmodernism, particularly with regard to narrative and the legitimacy of knowledge. While Goddess writers can be considered eclectic in a postmodern sense, they also construct their own metanarrative.


49 Some of my discourse may include terms that are not used by proponents. See Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, p. 6.
“Mythistory”, “historical imaginary” and “invention of tradition”

Pagan Studies academics and Goddess writers define Goddess worshippers’ version of the past in various ways, including: invention, (re)creation, myth, history, memory, or a combination of approaches. The concepts I have found to be particularly useful for articulating and understanding the complexity of their construction are “mythistory”, “historical imaginary” and “the invention of tradition”. While I do not view Goddess writers’ accounts of the past as objective history, the three concepts are not used pejoratively to suggest that the constructions are untruths; I find that these terms provide alternative ways for thinking about the functions of a group’s version of the past.

The term “mythistory” was coined by William McNeill in 1986, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association, in which he made several striking points concerning writers of history and their audiences. McNeill acknowledged that, despite historians’ noblest intentions, “objective history” and “absolute truth” are unattainable. In reality all historians are engaged in the production of a combination of history and myth. Pertinently for this thesis, McNeill emphasises the audience. He recognises that a historian’s account needs to be ‘credible as well as intelligible to an audience that shares enough of their particular outlook and assumptions to accept what they [the historians] say.’ McNeill observes that different audiences will respond differently to the same material.

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51 McNeill does not understand the term “myth” to mean “false”, the opposite of “truth”, as is its common usage. McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 3. Myth is used to mean a widely held idea that gives meaning to the world.
52 McNeill, however, does not believe that all “mythhistories” carry the same weight; he suggests that all historians should aspire to writing as accurate a history as possible, but not under the pretence of “objective” history. Following McNeill’s address, many historians have taken up his ideas. Paul Heehs, for example, writes that ‘What we call history is at best mythistory.’ Paul Heehs, ‘Myth, History, and Theory,’ History and Theory, vol. 33, no. 1, 1994, p. 1. In a similar vein, as will be elucidated in the ensuing pages, Eric Hobsbawm admits that historians are not immune from the practice of “creating”, or, as he refers to it, “inventing”. See Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions,’ in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p. 12. Paul Heehs also suggests that some writers (perhaps, those writing from a poststructuralist perspective) take McNeill’s ideas further, to the extent that, for example, ‘there can be no real distinction between the discourses of myth and history, between fact and fiction.’ Heehs, ‘Myth, History, and Theory,’ p. 1. Similarly, Elizabeth Tonkin believes that ‘[m]any historians live by the myth of realism.’ Elizabeth Tonkin, ‘History and the Myth of Realism,’ in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds), The Myths We Live By, Routledge, London & New York, 1990, p. 25.
53 McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 19.
54 McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 19.
McNeill’s term “mythistory” is useful for understanding Goddess worshippers’ version of the past because it suggests that there is more than one relevant history; because it recognises the influence of a group’s shared knowledge and expectations on the history that will be written for them; and because it acknowledges the selective nature of writing about the past. It is a group’s particular “mythistory”, therefore, that provides them with their identity, beliefs and meaning, while such identities create mythistories.

The second term that offers an insight into a narrative of the past is “historical imaginary”. The French historian of western Esotericism, Antoine Faivre, and scholar of religious studies, Karen-Claire Voss, define the term “imaginary” as follows:

[i]n the sense that the term ... has acquired in the humanities, mostly in France (“l'imaginaire” “un imaginaire”), this noun refers to the images, symbols, and myths which underlie and/or permeate a discourse, a conversation, a literary or artistic work, a current of thought, an artistic or political trend, etc. (whether consciously or not). In this sense, the word should not of course be understood to mean “unreal”, nor should it be confused with the term “imagination” which is used to refer to a faculty of the mind.56

On the surface this term may appear to be pejorative because of its linguistic association with the terms “imagination” and “imaging”. Faivre and Voss, however, emphasise the difference between the terms “imaginary” and “imagination”. The “imaginary”, therefore, is not to be equated with the unreal. While it may not necessarily be based on objective facts, it incorporates real and meaningful elements of group members’ lives.

All writers and historians select aspects from the past to construct a narrative that they claim represents that past. Such constructions are necessarily partial, both in the sense of presenting only a fragment of the past and in the sense of being written from a particular perspective; that is, they can never represent the past in its entirety, or without bias. Construction of an imaginary is not arbitrary, but political. The writers of Goddess literature, for example, construct a “historical imaginary” that is real and meaningful for their audience. They persist with a version that fulfils their needs and accords them an identity and meaning. The “historical imaginary” forms the group’s

55 McNeill explains that ‘[h]istorians are likely to select facts to show that we – whoever “we” may be – conform to our cherished principles’. McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 12.
collective memory and mentality, informs their beliefs, influences their behaviour, and helps to construct their imagined community.57

Thirdly, the historian Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, the “invention of tradition” is also useful as a tool for understanding the construction of Goddess worshippers’ “mythistory”. Hobsbawm contends that “‘[t]raditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.”58 Hobsbawm goes on to explain that “‘[i]nvented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices ... which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”59 Hobsbawm discusses “invention of tradition” in regard to nationalism and national histories. In relation to the concepts of “France” and “the French”, he declares that, despite their images of being ‘rooted in the remotest antiquity,’ and of being a “natural” community, ‘these very concepts themselves must include a constructed or “invented” component.’60 Like Hobsbawm, Anthony D. Smith analyses the type of construction that occurs in the project of creating national histories and identities. He regards the construction of a national history to be more of a reconstruction of particular elements of a group’s past than a wholesale invented tradition. Smith argues that reconstruction of ‘[t]raditions, myths, history and symbols’ will not last if it is not based on the ‘existing, living memories and beliefs of the people who are to compose the nation.’61 The invented components of a construction, therefore, need to be grounded in memory and beliefs in order for a group to embrace or identify with them. While nationalism has been the major locus for these insights, they also apply to religion and, importantly, to the topic of this thesis. From an outsider’s perspective, contemporary Goddess worship can be seen as an “invented tradition” and to have emerged in the 1970s, while from an insider’s perspective, elements of its heritage can be traced back to prehistory.

57 I am employing Benedict Anderson’s use of the term “imagined community”. Anderson uses it to define a nation, as follows: ‘[i]t is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Verso, London & New York, 1991, p. 6. Italics in original. The term is applicable to religious as well as national communities.
Hobsbawm's use of the term "invented tradition" may be interpreted as implying that tradition is fictitious, and thus could be seen to be more pejorative than McNeill's term "mythistory" or Faivre and Voss's definition of "imaginary". Close analysis, however, suggests that Hobsbawm is not claiming that a nation's history is entirely an invention, but that a component of it is invented. The term "invented tradition", therefore, needs to be used with caution and to be understood as one dimension of the process of constructing a history. The phrase "invention of tradition" is most useful when considering the implications of the term, such as "continuity with the past" or the construction of a "suitable historic past" – practices that Goddess writers employ to secure legitimacy.

The practices of "inventing a tradition" or of creating a "mythistory" or a "historical imaginary" are not unusual, nor are they applicable only to new religious movements. McNeill explains that '[g]roups struggling towards self-consciousness ... are likely to demand (and get) vivid, simplified portraits of their admirable virtues and undeserved sufferings'. The historian of British Paganism, Ronald Hutton, suggests that there are several ways to portray the relationship between contemporary Pagan religion and ancient Paganism. One way is to see the contemporary religion as 'modern developments responding to modern needs, but drawing selectively and creatively on ideas and images from the ancient past.' Like McNeill, Hutton accentuates the selective and creative nature of writing about the past. Hutton calls this practice the "pastiche" effect, but stresses that 'there is nothing derogatory in the term and that this effect is a common one in the history of religion.' Likewise, the terms "mythistory", "historical imaginary", and "invented tradition" will not be used pejoratively or thought to refer exclusively to the practices of Goddess writers.

The three formulations, "mythistory", "historical imaginary" and "invented tradition", offer a way to understand Goddess writers' construction of a past. While they have originated from different scholars with different contexts in mind, the outcomes of the three terms are similar: they illustrate the selectivity involved in constructing a history.

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62 See Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' p. 14, for the suggestion that a "component" of a nation's image is "invented". See Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' p. 12, for Hobsbawm discussing how a "dimension" of what historians do contributes to "invented traditions".
63 McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 13.
64 Hutton, 'Paganism and Polemic,' p. 109.
65 Interestingly, they suffer criticism for this practice from some scholars, rather than their practice being considered normal.
and the importance of the audience. While elements of the historical narrative may not be “objectively” true, they are grounded in a group’s collective memory and, therefore, give their world meaning. For the purpose of this thesis the terms are employed to show the importance of a version of the past in consolidating a community through memory, identity and beliefs. Firstly, I will argue that Goddess writers’ understanding of the past, regardless of academic criticism and practitioners’ varied and complex attitudes to history, forms the bedrock of their religion. Secondly, I will demonstrate that Goddess writers’ use and understanding of history differ markedly from academic history (particularly, in the way that Goddess writers and historians engage with sources) and, in many ways, resemble indigenous attitudes to the past; for instance, in the way that a group’s past is ritually evoked and forms the basis of their contemporary collective identity.67

Goddess writers’ attitudes to history

In order to explain why I argue that a sense of history is fundamental to Goddess worship it is necessary to explore Goddess writers’ attitudes to history. It will become clear that despite the Goddess writers’ varied and complex attitudes to history, they all ultimately require a notion of history to provide exemplars and inspiration, as well as to accord legitimacy, meaning and identity. History provides the movement with a voice.

While Goddess writers’ attitudes to history are conflicting, they nevertheless give value to a notion of the past. In The Reflowering of the Goddess Gloria Orenstein emphasises the importance of non-empirical knowledges when she explains the following: ‘sensing, psyching out, intuiting, feeling, imagining, and creating, they are bringing forth a body of teachings that, while it may not be the literal truth of our ancient past, can nevertheless constitute what we might call a “Feminist Matristic Path”’.68 Here, firstly, Orenstein implies that non-empirical knowledges may not arrive at the “literal truth”. Secondly, she suggests that “literal truth” is not crucial. Yet she immediately recants this second conclusion and emphasises the importance of “historical reality”. For example, she points out that

67 In Chapter Four I will employ the late Minoru Hokari’s explication of the Gurindji people’s (of the Northern Territory, Australia) ways of maintaining history to illustrate this argument. See Minoru Hokari, ‘Maintaining History: The Gurindji People’s “Truthful Histories”,’ Cultural Survival Quarterly, Summer, 2002, pp. 26–27.
[t]o call the Goddess an archetype is to relegate some 30,000 years of human history to the level of the unconscious and to negate the actual historical reality of centuries of human life. Therefore the Goddess is anything but abistorical! The history of the Goddess actually exceeds that of the Father God by millennia.69

Orenstein further asserts the importance of history in several comments, such as ‘[t]he Goddess symbol reminds us of the approximately 30,000 years of human history’.70 She emphasises that the Goddess is real and historical. She claims, for example, that ‘[t]he Great Goddess ... refers to a historic reality, not a fantasy, and is a signal recalling to our mind the actual historic past’.71 Similarly, Naomi Goldenberg encourages devotees, on the one hand, to take up Monique Wittig’s challenge, which is, ‘[t]here was a time when you were not a slave, remember... Or failing that, invent.’72 And on the other hand, in the next paragraph, she asserts that millions of women were massacred during the Middle Ages, clearly referring to a notion of history.73 Starhawk and Carol Christ also dismiss the objective past and yet simultaneously claim with conviction that what they are discussing is historically verifiable.74

A common response of writers of Goddess literature has been to say that history, “the literal truth”, does not matter. A significant example of a negative attitude towards historical practice is found in an article by Judy Harrow:

[i]n the final analysis, none of this matters, because history is, for us, only a source of inspiration, to be selectively drawn on like all other sources. What religion is really about is not history, but myth — teaching stories that may or may not be factual, but that carry our deepest values. Mary Jo Weaver points out that our origin myths actually serve us as utopian myths, expressing our hopes for a very different and far better future ...

... If Christians and Jews can use dubious history as empowering myth, so can the rest of us.75

71 Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 21. Many other comments by Orenstein suggest that she takes history seriously. For example, in her discussion of various types of amnesia and 'selective memory', she claims that important history regarding women has been lost. She suggests 'that to remember the reality of a buried history can promote the healing of many wounds'. Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 23. Italics in original. Furthermore, she believes that 'She [the Goddess] is reclaimed to provide the information and evidence lacking in general education in order for us to confront mainstream religious ideologies and to trigger our historic memory of times that were real.' Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 20. Italics in original.
74 Starhawk and Carol Christ’s attitudes to history will become clear in the following pages. See also, for example, Donna Wilshire, ‘The Uses of Myth, Image, and the Female Body in Re-Visioning Knowledge,’ in Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (eds), Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1989, p. 107.
An abundance of Goddess writers’ comments implies that Goddess writers do not mind if a woman-centred society and religion never existed because they can simply “invent” this past. Usually in the same paragraph, article, or book the writers, however, refer to history or a concept of the past as being real and, therefore, important to them. A further example of the acknowledgement of history is Starhawk’s inclusion of an appendix entitled, “The Burning Times: Notes on a Crucial Period of History” in her book, Dreaming the Dark, in which she presents a detailed history. For example, she reflects:

[w]e survive still, in the culture of estrangement, for how much longer no one knows. Yet to change that culture intelligently, we must understand it, trace its roots, know its history – not because estrangement is the lineal descendent of one particular historical event or time, but because the past is still alive in the present.76

Starhawk goes on to claim that to trace the history of estrangement would be to tell all of history, an unfeasible enterprise, so she highlights one important event in the history of estrangement – the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.77 Therefore, even when it is not the intention of some Goddess writers to emphasise history, they inevitably do so, thus illustrating that history actually does matter to them.

Responses to criticism are also evident in Goddess writers’ attitudes to history. Starhawk, for instance, shows an awareness of academic criticism, as well as an understanding of the range of sources that can be used to construct the past. She explains that we can “know” the past by interpreting, or intuiting, objects such as reproductions of Goddess images; we do not have to rely on more conventional sources such as written texts.78 Starhawk refers to the tension that has existed between Goddess writers and their academic critics in the following excerpt from the chapter “The Dismembering of the World”:

Scholars, including some feminists, argue about whether such times existed. We cannot prove to them that the mother-times were real, for the academy accepts only written evidence. Their definition of what can be considered fact claims to be objective, but it is inevitably skewed. For texts do not preserve the mysteries, nor can they fully record the reality of oral cultures. And texts are written by people with biases and interests to preserve. It was

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77 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 185.
78 Starhawk, Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery, HarperSanFrancisco, 1987, p. 32.
While many historians would disagree with Starhawk’s narrow definition of their contemporary historical practice, the extract above nevertheless illustrates the animosity felt by some Goddess writers towards academe and of their awareness of the different sources used to write history.

While some Goddess writers seemingly place less emphasis on history, or, more particularly, on historical accuracy, others believe that their history is a factual version of the past. The very title of an article written by Riane Eisler in 1985 explicitly illustrates her trust in an interpretation of archaeological sources. The title and subtitle read, “Our Lost Heritage: New Facts on How God Became a Man – archaeological finds shed new light on the most remarkable sex change in the history of the world.” Eisler adds that ‘[o]nce again, the archaeological findings... not only demolish the old “truism” of the “warlike Neolithic” but also illuminate our true past’. From a four-year ethnographic study of a Dianic coven and a women’s spirituality group, both situated in California, Wendy Griffin discovered that ‘[w]omen in both core groups appear to accept uncritically the belief in prehistorical “Goddess Cultures” where women and “women’s values” were a major part of the societal ethos.’ Similarly, ten years’ experience in the feminist spirituality movement in the United States has led Cynthia Eller to state that

[w]ith some exceptions, spiritual feminists regard their sacred history as history, pure and simple. They offer evidence that they deem to be archaeologically and historically sound, and believe that any reasonable person will accept this evidence as proof that the basic outlines of their story are verifiable.

Carol Christ takes a scholarly approach and claims to use evidence to support her theses. In the chapter “The History of the Goddess” in Rebirth of the Goddess, Christ’s

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79 Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 32.
80 In recent decades many historians have increasingly engaged with sources other than written texts.
81 Starhawk recognises that scholars may not like her sources, when she explains that ‘[t]he history presented here is the “inner” or “mythic” history that provides a touchstone for modern witches. Like the histories of all peoples, its truth is intuited in the meaning it gives to life, even though it may be recognized that scholars might dispute some facets of the story.’ Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ p. 268, footnote 1.
83 Eisler, ‘Our Lost Heritage,’ p. 27.
attitude to history, research, and evidence becomes evident. She argues, for instance, that

Goddess religion is far more ancient than Judaism and Christianity. The new story about the Goddess is not the story told in major and well-accepted texts in the history of religion, archaeology, and classics. ... Based on several decades of re-searching [sic] the sources, a new interpretive framework I call the "Goddess hypothesis" draws together archaeological, historical, and anthropological evidence and theory. In it, both women and Goddesses play important roles in human history.86

Even more definitive is Carol Christ's declaration in the chapter "Reclaiming Goddess History" in her book The Laughter of Aphrodite, where she proclaims, 'I have not been satisfied to set history aside, to say that the past does not matter. Therefore I have chosen to search the historical and prehistorical record for clues'.87 Here is a Goddess writer explicitly claiming the importance of history.88 Whether or not it is historically accurate, in an academic sense, is of less concern.89 The thematic chapters below will elucidate the importance a notion of history provides to the Goddess movement with regard to issues of identity creation, legitimising the movement, providing women with a voice, and enabling a group to find a sense of liberation.

The broad endeavour of writing about the past can be conceived of in a number of ways including invention, mythmaking, imagination, reconstruction, recreation, and history. At one end of the history/myth spectrum are so-called objective histories and at the other end is pure myth. With regard to the group under study I suggest that their version of the past exists somewhere along the spectrum; where exactly is not the issue. A particular focus of this thesis will be how different approaches and sources intertwine to form a mythistory that is instrumental in enabling Goddess worshippers to connect

87 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 161. Rachel Pollack firmly believes that her practice is based in research. She explains, for instance: "[t]his idea captivated me. Like many people, I had earlier suspected that the concept of the Great Goddess was a modern invention, a feminist myth. Though my early reading changed my mind and showed me the solid research behind the image of the Goddess, it was the ideas of Lobell and Scully which gave the Goddess a physical reality. I had never experienced such a reality in the traditional religious ideas of my own society." Pollack, The Body of the Goddess, p. 17.
88 Carol Christ also points to the selectivity involved in constructing the past from all sides. She explains that "[f]eminist critical reconstruction as method does not oppose itself to other forms of history that are based solely on the "facts," but rather points out that all history is told within the framework of a "unifying vision" that involves all scholars in an imaginative selection and reconstruction of the past." Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 162.
89 Orenstein, for instance, is explicitly not concerned with scientifically proven facts. Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. xviii. She appears to be offering her readers a choice between "empirical" truth and "moral" truth. One can either accept moral truth, and in doing so embrace a charter to save the planet, or accept empirical truth and, in the process, denounce the Goddess writers' version of the past and reject Orenstein's proposal; she downplays the importance of empirical truth in the grand scheme of saving the world.
with their deity, temporally and spatially, through myth, ritual, symbols, and at sacred sites and landscapes, and in so doing, provide followers with meaning and empowerment.

II. The contemporary religion of Goddess worship: describing the movement and clarifying terminology

Today Goddess worship is a growing contemporary Pagan movement in North America, Europe and the Antipodes. It is difficult to calculate the exact number of Pagans due to the fact that most are not affiliated with ‘membership organisations’, but belong to ‘small autonomous groups or are solo practitioners’. Estimates for the USA range from Margot Adler’s figure of 50 000 – 100 000, to a suggestion of several

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90 At the outset it is necessary to clarify the terms “religion” and “spirituality”. From her field-based study of contemporary Paganism and Witchcraft in the USA, Helen Berger found that ‘[s]ome witches, most particularly participants in all-women’s groups, contend that they are participating not in a religion but in a spiritual path. They consider this distinction important because they view religions as oppressive organizations. They celebrate the fact that their practices and beliefs are not institutionalized.’ Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 5. Z. Budapest, for example, explains that ‘[s]pirituality isn’t necessarily a religion. It can be a spontaneous communication with spirits around us, without any type of formalizing. But eventually formalizing occurs and then we’ve got religion.’ Budapest, The Holy Book: Part One, p. 86. Johanna Stuckey points out that ‘the word “spirituality” usually brings to people’s minds religious associations or even ascetic ones suggesting renunciation of the world. However, spirituality is not separate from everyday, secular endeavours. Quite the contrary – it is a force that informs all human experience.’ Ursula King, Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise, New Amsterdam Books, New York, 1989; reprint, revised and updated 1993, pp. 5–6, paraphrased in Johanna H. Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality: An Introduction to Feminist Theology in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Feminist Goddess Worship, York University, Toronto, 1998, p. 5.

Spirituality is a difficult term to define. As Stuckey explains, spirituality is often used to avoid the term religion, ‘which they [writers who deal with the subject] understand as problematic because of the Western assumptions that go with it.’ Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 6. Some Goddess writers, such as Z. Budapest, are hostile towards religions (particularly western religions), viewing them as unspiritual. See examples in Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, p. 326. Many associate the term “religion” with western, institutionalised religions, in which priests and the holy book are perceived to hold authority and knowledge. Many scholars and practitioners, however, do refer to Goddess worship, feminist witchcraft, and Wicca as religions. See, for example, Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, pp. 11–12. Helen Berger argues that contemporary witchcraft is a religion. Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 4. Melissa Raphael also refers to Goddess spirituality as a religion. See Melissa Raphael, “Truth in Flux: Goddess Feminism as a Late Modern Religion,” Religion, vol. 26, 1996, p. 199. Whatever the case, in this thesis the terms “spirituality” and “religion” will be used interchangeably.

91 While Goddess worship is particularly practiced in the English-speaking western world, I am aware that it is also followed in non-English speaking western countries, such as The Netherlands, Germany and Italy. More recently, it is being practised in former communist states, such as the Czech Republic. For the purposes of this PhD thesis it is not possible to consider the manifestation of this Anglo movement in the non-Anglo, particularly European, countries. This could, however, be a fascinating future study.


93 Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 455. Adler claims that ‘[a]s many as one hundred thousand people in America, both women and men, call themselves Neopagans.’ Margot Adler, ‘The Juice and the
hundred thousand by Aidan Kelly.94 According to Helen Berger, estimates for the USA range from 150,000 to 400,000.95 Berger explains that 5,530 Canadians, out of 26,994,045, categorised themselves as Pagan in the 1991 Canadian census.96 Vivianne Crowley cites figures related to the British context that range from 50,000 to as high as 200,000.97 Carole Cusack calculated the total number of Pagans from the 2001 Australian census to be 23,394.98 The New Zealand’s 2001 census reveals that 5,862 citizens identified as Pagan.99 Whatever the case, today Paganism is a small, but expanding religion. In the ten years between the 1991 and 2001 census the number of Pagans in Australia, for example, at least doubled.100

Goddess worshippers revere the Goddess and, by extension, women’s experiences. As the Goddess is understood to be an “immanent” deity,101 this spiritual path lends itself to earth and nature worship. Devotees practice rituals in accordance with the seasonal and lunar cycles, visit particular landscapes and sacred sites, and find inspiration and empowerment in their particular version of the past. Contemporary Goddess worship is known by various names, including “Goddess religion”, “Goddess spirituality”, “feminist witchcraft”, “Goddess feminism” and “women’s spirituality”.102 The

95 Berger, ‘Witchcraft and Neopaganism,’ p. 28.
96 Berger, ‘Witchcraft and Neopaganism,’ p. 28.
97 Crowley, ‘Wicca as Nature Religion,’ pp. 171–172. Crowley finds her figures in Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey (eds), Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century, Thorsons, London, 1996, and in newspaper articles. The latter figure that she suggests appears to be inflated. I have found that she misquotes Hardman, if indeed she is referring to Hardman, ‘Introduction,’ p. ix.
99 Rountree, Embracing the Witch and the Goddess, pp. 7–8. As Rountree points out, this figure is from a total population of 3.7 million.
101 “Immanence” is usually defined in opposition to “transcendence”. While the Goddess, for example, is presented as being “immanent” in nature, a “transcendent” deity, for example, the God of monotheistic religions, is imagined as separate from the earthly realm. In philosophical terms, Carol Christ defines “transcendence” as “beyond,” “surpassing,” or “supreme,” and “immanence” as “existing within.” Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 101.
102 I will refrain from using the term “women’s spirituality” in referring to contemporary Goddess worship because, as Hanegraaff explains, ‘women’s spirituality is ... [an] unspecific term’. Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, p. 86. Although some feminists do use it ‘as a synonym for Goddess spirituality and feminist witchcraft’, others employ it as a broader term, which means that it
anthropologist Kathryn Rountree recognises that outside the movement people are surprised to find that the two labels “feminist witchcraft” and “Goddess spirituality” are used to refer to the one phenomenon.103 This usage makes perfect sense, however, inside the movement, where the stereotypically negative image of the “witch” is deconstructed and embraced, as is the image of the “Goddess”, as a source of empowerment.104 The images of “witch” and “Goddess”, as Rountree explains, are both believed to ‘constitute [an] image of female power outside of male control’105 and ‘far from being [considered] polar opposites, the witch and the goddess are [considered to be] one’ by practitioners.106

Goddess worship is one of several contemporary spiritual paths that are incorporated under the umbrella term Paganism.107 Paganism is also known as neo-Paganism and contemporary Paganism. Like the other neo-Pagan paths, contemporary Goddess worship is described as polytheistic, animistic and pantheistic.108 At the same time, Goddess worship is also described as being monotheistic.109 It will become clear in the thematic chapters below that Goddess writers’ definitions of the Goddess sometimes appear to be incompatible and that the writers are not perturbed by such ambiguities.
In terms of organisation and leadership, Goddess worship is characterised as being less institutionalised, structured and hierarchical, in contrast to the traditional monotheistic religions of Christianity and Judaism.\textsuperscript{110} Goddess worship has no set liturgy or sacred book and there is no specification as to which deities are to be revered, or which period of history or culture is to be used for inspiration. Goddess worshippers may perform rituals organised at the whim and intuition of a practitioner who feels drawn to leading, or by a designated leader. Some forms of Goddess worship may require training and initiation, while others may not, affirming instead that women are witches simply because they are women.\textsuperscript{111} Cynthia Eller suggests that Goddess worship's primary characteristic is variety.\textsuperscript{112} Likewise, Mary Jo Neitz highlights the 'many different groups and perspectives' encompassed in the movement.\textsuperscript{113} Despite this emphasis on variety, as far as demography is concerned, anthropological surveys, such as Helen Berger's American study, have found the majority of Pagans to be white, middle-class and well-educated.\textsuperscript{114} We will find that the white bias can be attributed to the fact that European traditions, histories and myths are fundamental to Goddess worship, and that such worship naturally reflects worshippers' prior identities.

Goddess writers transvalue the traditional sex role stereotypes. They attribute equal or superior value to women's experiences, characteristics and reproductive capacity. According to Carol Christ, the ritual process of revering the Goddess leads to the appreciation and empowerment of women and their bodies. Christ, for example, claims that

\textsuperscript{110} Mary Jo Neitz, for example, explains that '[p]articipants share the symbol of the Goddess and a repudiation of the dominant Judeo-Christian tradition, but the movement has no unifying organization, written scriptures, or dogma, no defining ritual practice.' Mary Jo Neitz, 'In Goddess We Trust,' in Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony (eds), \textit{In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America}, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1991, p. 355.

\textsuperscript{111} Eller, \textit{Living in the Lap of the Goddess}, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{112} Eller, \textit{Living in the Lap of the Goddess}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{113} Neitz, 'In Goddess We Trust,' p. 353.

\textsuperscript{114} Berger, \textit{A Community of Witches}, p. 8. Berger adds that '[i]n “The Pagan Census” we found that 90.4 percent of the respondents were white'. Berger breaks down the figures by education, location, class and ethnicity. See Berger, \textit{A Community of Witches}, pp. 8–11, 123. In Berger, ‘Witchcraft and Neopaganism,’ p. 28, she includes gender statistics; referring to neo-Paganism in general, Berger found 65–66 per cent of participants to be female. Kathryn Rountree describes the feminist witches that she has come to know in her thirteen years of anthropological fieldwork as being 'mostly middle-class, well-educated, liberal-minded feminist women with whom, in fact, I have a great deal in common. They are good mothers and devoted grandmothers, lesbian and straight, married and single, old and young women who are socially responsible and deeply concerned about the environment.' Rountree, \textit{Embracing the Witch and the Goddess}, p. 10. See also: Carpenter, ‘Practitioners of Paganism and Wiccan Spirituality,’ p. 401; Adler, ‘The Juice and the Mystery,’ p. 151.
Goddess is a name that must be spoken if female power is to be acknowledged as legitimate. Goddesses also celebrate the female body, remind us of our connections to nature, and encourage us to celebrate the bonds we share as women.115

Similarly, Mary Jo Neitz explains that ‘feminist witches see the Goddess as a symbol for the empowerment of women.'116

Whether proponents label themselves as “Pagans” and “witches” depends on how the terms are viewed in their societies and whether they are willing to identify themselves publicly with labels that are often viewed negatively. Throughout history the term Pagan has been used pejoratively, ranging from “country-dweller” to “anti-religious”.117 Likewise, the term “witch”118 has been used in a derogatory manner, but like the title Pagan, is inverted and claimed as a positive label by Goddess worshippers, for political, spiritual and historical reasons.119 The negative stereotype (broom-riding, black, ugly

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115 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 111.
116 Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ p. 353.
117 Numerous writers have attempted to define the term “Pagan”, showing its various meanings throughout history, all with slight variations. Mary Jo Neitz’s definitions include the following: 1) ‘polytheistic religion of native or tribal people,’ 2) “antireligious hedonism” in modern culture, 3) contemporary polytheistic nature religions, 4) pre-Christian religions. Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ p. 357. With assistance from the Oxford English Dictionary, Dennis Carpenter defines “Paganism” as: 1) ‘derived from the Latin “paganus” meaning villager, rustic, civilian, non-militant’; 2) one of a nation or community which does not hold the true religion, or does not worship the true God; 3) worshipping idols, heathen; 4) nature-worshipping, pantheistic.’ Carpenter, ‘Practitioners of Paganism and Wiccan Spirituality,’ pp. 374–375. Margot Adler defines the Latin term “paganus” as ‘country dweller’ and explains that the root of “paganus” is “pagus”, which means ‘village or rural district’. Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 9. It is interesting to see how the original Latin use has progressively become more negative. The shift from “country dweller” to “non-Christian” seems to have occurred because early Christianity was primarily urban. Today, however, some sections of the population embrace the term in a positive way. Carpenter’s definition 4) and Neitz’s definition 3) are used by contemporary Pagans to describe their form of spirituality as nature-based, and this is how the term will be employed in this thesis.
118 The word “witch” is believed to derive from the Old English “wice/wicca”, and comes from the word “wik” (or “wic” or “weik”), which means ‘to bend or to shape’. Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ p. 357; Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 11; Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 11. Adler notes that some witches believe that the term comes from the root word “wit” or wisdom. She adds that “Witchcraft” is defined by witches as the “Craft of the Wise”, as “Wisecraft” or “Wiccacraft”. In the contemporary context the term “witch” is used to refer to followers of Wicca. As Goddess worship is known as feminist witchcraft, Goddess worshippers are equally known as “Goddess worshippers” and as “feminist witches”. They can also simply be referred to as “witches”. To be known simply as a “witch” is confusing because it is difficult to know if this means a Wiccan witch or a feminist witch/Goddess worshipper.
119 Neitz suggests that some covens have remained secretive due to the negative connotations associated with the term “witch” in western culture. Even if they believe that they are witches, it seems to be less risky to use the term “Pagan” in public. In other cases, where people want to attract attention (such as political or media attention) they use the term witch proudly and loudly. Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ pp. 357–358. See the example of the WITCH acronym created by Robin Morgan in Section III of this chapter. Others, as will be illustrated later in this chapter, invert the meaning and embrace the term, using it as they would the term Goddess. The title “witch”, furthermore, is seen to be empowering as witches claim that their ancestors were the original fighters against oppression. Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess, p. 53. Loretta Orion addresses the paradox of the term witch in Orion, Never Again the Burning Times, p. 41. Rosemary Ellen Guiley also scrutinises the use of the term witchcraft by Goddess worshippers. She questions the use of such a term ‘when it [Goddess worship] presents itself as the
witch) has been replaced by a positive image of a witch associated with wisdom, power and freedom. In the Goddess understanding, a witch can be young, attractive and sexual. She can also be elderly and beautiful – thus, Goddess writers transvalue the negative stereotype of the crone. Numerous writers are careful to disassociate their contemporary image of a witch from the early modern European inquisitors’ stereotype of witches making pacts with the Devil, and stress that the contemporary practice is in no way associated with Satanism. Goddess writers maintain that the Devil is a Christian invention, and, as their religion allegedly precedes Christianity, it follows that it has no role for Satan. While the term witchcraft typically conjures images of malevolent black magic, contemporary witchcraft of the western world embodies an association with benevolent magic.

In contemporary Paganism, the general label “witchcraft” refers to Wicca, while the term “feminist witchcraft”, which is referred to as Goddess worship in this study, encompasses both Liberal and Dianic witchcraft. As Susan Greenwood explains, Wicca emphasises ‘sexual polarity’, while feminist witchcraft gives prominence to ‘sex unity’ and is tolerant of ‘sexual ambiguity’. Gardnerian Wiccan covens, for instance, balance the number of men and women and are ‘led by a priest(ess)hood.’ Feminist witchcraft covens, in contrast, ‘tend to organise in mono-sexual, anti-hierarchical antithesis of witchcraft as sorcery.’
The term Dianic is employed in the literature with slightly different meanings. Mary Jo Nietz suggests that the term Dianic was used in the early 1970s to describe ‘a tradition where the Goddess is primary’.129 Neitz notes that this usage has changed over time to refer to ‘women-only, feminist covens’.130 According to Greenwood, while Liberal groups include men and women, Dianic covens are ‘women-only and frequently lesbian’.131 Carol Christ concluded from an overview of Goddess worship that most Goddess feminist groups or covens consist entirely of women and are concerned with giving ‘voice to our [women’s] spiritual longings’ because they have been neglected in a culture ‘in which women’s experience and women’s spiritual visions are not valued.’132 Christ is quick to point out that it is not the case that men are not welcome in Goddess worship. She explains that ‘[i]t is premature to condemn a feminist movement for its failure to include men when in fact very few men are interested in having a part in it.’133 Those men who are sympathetic to the movement and interested in discovering their feminine side, it seems, are welcomed. While separatism is not advocated on the whole, Christ suggests that women may require space. She reflects, for instance, that ‘[a]s long as patriarchal culture continues to exist, women will still need to find spaces where we can be somewhat free of patriarchal attitudes.’134

While practitioners may embrace titles like witch and Pagan, they adamantly reject the label New-Ager. Nevertheless, neo-Pagan paths can be seen to exist within a broader cultural trend referred to as the New Age.135 Goddess worshippers are usually quick to

129 Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ p. 367.
130 Neitz, ‘In Goddess We Trust,’ p. 367.
131 Greenwood, ‘The Nature of the Goddess,’ p. 106. Janice Crosby, for example, refers to Dianic covens as being women-only. Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 25. Greenwood adds that American “Dianic” witchcraft is based on the reverence of the Goddess Diana. Greenwood, ‘The Nature of the Goddess,’ p. 110, footnote 5. Z. Budapest’s type of feminist witchcraft is known for being radical and the original Dianic form. In Budapest, The Holy Book: Part One, p. 18, Budapest includes a section on birth control, which suggests that she is not advocating lesbian-only Dianic covens.
132 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 69.
133 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 70.
134 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 70.
135 The term does not refer literally to a New Age. The New Age movement is a striking contemporary social and spiritual phenomenon. It consists of diverse and eclectic practices with an emphasis on personal transformation and healing, and engages with indigenous cultures, eastern philosophies and bygone periods as well as peace, ecology and the occult. Techniques include meditation, channelling, reiki, astrology, crystal therapy, tarot, yoga and magic. The Neoplatonists’ revival of magic during the Renaissance period, the nineteenth-century alternative movements of Spiritualism and Theosophy, and the 1960s counterculture are some of the historical antecedents and sources of inspiration for New Age thinking. In the last two decades New Age wares, books and information can be found in bookstores,
distinguish themselves from the “workshop junky” or “kitsch” label attached to the New Age, but they nevertheless support New Age shops, wares and professionals.


Johanna Stuckey points out that the New Age Movement and feminist Goddess worship arose at the same time, but acknowledges that they have different motivations. She explains, for example, that the ‘New Age seems to refer to a very amorphous set of leanings, for instance, toward exploring Eastern religions, the occult, and various kinds of divination and healing techniques, to name only a few.’ The overlap between the two includes ‘[t]he use [of] the same venues for classes, talks, workshops, sale of ornaments and cultic tools’ and she adds that ‘New Age interest in crystal, horoscopes, and tarot reading have also influenced Feminist Goddess Worshippers.’ Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 133. Aidan Kelly indicates some differences between witchcraft and the New Age, including: 1) New Agers believe that ‘spirituality is best learned by sitting at the feet of a master teacher or guru, preferably from one of the Eastern religions’. 2) ‘Most Neopagans believe that they are practicing an ancient folk religion, whether as a survival or a revival; and, being focused on the pagan religions of the past’. Kelly, Crafting the Art of Magic, Book I, p. 16. Kelly also compares and contrasts neo-Paganism and the New Age movement in Aidan A. Kelly, ‘An Update on Neopagan Witchcraft in America,’ in James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (eds), Perspectives on the New Age, SUNY Press, Albany, New York, 1992, pp. 136–151. For an analysis of the differences and similarities between the two movements, see Michael York, ‘New Age and Paganism,’ in Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey (eds), Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century, Thorsons, London, 1996, pp. 157–165; Michael York, The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Maryland & London, 1995. See also Monica Sjöö, New Age and Armageddon: The Goddesses or the Gurus? Toward a Feminist Vision of the Future, The Women’s Press, London, 1992, p. 2, for criticism of the New Age movement from a Pagan perspective. After attending many New Age events, Sjöö found New Age thinking to be patriarchal and reactionary, ‘in spite of its deceptive facade of niceness, love, light and claims to Earth healing.’ See also Monica Sjöö (1938–2005), Autobiography 4, Annie Johnston, 2005, <http://www.monica sj o. org/bio/autobiography4. html> (accessed 16 September 2007), where Sjöö is scathing about the New-Age strand known as “Rebirthers” and where she described her experience at events: ‘I had been present at very dubious New Age events, all very patriarchal, misogynist, racist and rightwing in their assumptions.’

Goddess worshippers rely on New Age shops for information and organisation, in the form of books and workshops, and patronise masseuses, herbal healers, tarot readers and psychics.
From the numerous Pagan spiritual paths I have chosen Goddess worship to be the focus of this project. The way the movement endeavours to challenge "patriarchal" society, religion, philosophy and history leads to fascinating findings on many levels. Firstly, its transvaluation of traditional sex role stereotypes is empowering to women and offers them a new perspective on their roles, phases of life, and their bodies. Secondly, its non-hierarchical philosophy encourages an interconnected approach to ecology. Above all, these projects are situated within the feminist enterprise of re-writing history.

III. Roots, influences and development: situating Goddess worship in a historical context

Goddess worship can be seen to have (re)emerged from the 1960s/70s period of counter-cultural idealism and to have adopted the cultural and political concerns of the women's liberation and environmental movements. Like the broader field of neo-Paganism, however, it can be situated in a much older historical context. Scholars suggest, for instance, that the antecedents of neo-Paganism can be found as far back as the fifteenth-century revival of magic by the Florentine Neoplatonists, as well as in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Romanticism and Occultism – in movements, for example, such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.138 The idealisation of nature and celebration of the Goddess in Romantic English poetry, which was a response to industrialisation and increased urbanisation, is also seen as a historical precursor to neo-Paganism.139 In addition, nineteenth- and


139 The British historian Ronald Hutton emphasises the importance of eighteenth-century Romanticism and the work of the Victorian poets for the contemporary image of the Goddess. For more detail, see:
twentieth-century theories about the Goddess in ancient history and archaeology, stemming from figures such as J.J. Bachofen, Sir Arthur Evans, Jane Ellen Harrison, Jacqueta Hawkes, Sir James Frazer, James Mellaart, and Robert Graves, have influenced the contemporary Goddess movement.¹⁴⁰ The origins of British witchcraft (Wicca) in the late 1930s and the influences of figures such as its founder Gerald Gardner,¹⁴¹ as well as Margaret Murray,¹⁴² are undoubtedly important sources from which the contemporary Goddess worshipping strand of Paganism ultimately emerged.¹⁴³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to detail the development of alternative spiritualities in the western world, which occurred over several centuries at the end of the second millennium. The purpose of this current section is to present a brief overview of the evolution of contemporary Goddess worship from the 1970s onwards and to consider the movements, events, and key figures that have influenced its development.

It was in the USA, amidst the broader counter-cultural milieu, where blending occurred between Wicca and American developments in feminist spirituality.¹⁴⁴ Cynthia Eller observes that an intersection occurred between three social trends: ‘radical (secular)
feminism; Jewish and Christian feminism; and neopaganism. Some feminists were 'driven to religious concerns by the strength of their feminism' while others were devout, but unhappy with the religious institution to which they belonged. The Catholic theologian Mary Daly exemplifies the latter category. Daly revived the questioning of Judeo-Christian religions that had been undertaken nearly a century earlier by Matilda Joslyn Gage and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The established religions were dominated by male priests, a male deity and sexist language, and, as a result, were seen by feminists as oppressing women. Mary Daly deduced that if God were male then society would be male-dominated. A transcendent God ruler, therefore, is seen to justify and/or cause the oppression of women. Rosemary Radford Ruether has also been an influential feminist theologian and, like Daly, advocated reforming the Christian church from within. The other alternatives, at that time, were to reject

145 Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' p. 25. In addition, Janice Crosby also includes the importance of cultural forces such as 'the resurgence of ethnic pride, nationalism, and cultural heritage among Americans of non-European descent'. Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 9. Other scholars highlight slight variations on what they view as the key elements that led to the rise of feminist witchcraft. Kathryn Rountree discusses three strands: WITCH (the political covens, the acronym of which had various meanings depending on the political action), traditional Wicca, and the Goddess movement. See Rountree, 'The New Witch of the West,' pp. 216-218. She also mentions the importance of Christian feminism. Vivianne Crowley also observes that there are three main paths to becoming Pagan, which are, in her opinion: 'feminism, ecological awareness and a desire for occult power or knowledge: the way of the witch.' Vivianne Crowley, 'Women and Power in Modern Paganism,' in Elizabeth Puttick and Peter B. Clark (eds), Women as Teachers and Disciples in Traditional and New Religions, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, 1993, p. 126.

146 Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' p. 29.


149 Daly declared, for example, that '[i]f God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.' Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973, p. 13.

150 For example, Daly explains that a man dominates his wife because he is modelling himself on God. Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 13; See also Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' p. 31. Furthermore, Daly refers to patriarchal times as a perpetual witchcraze (that is, the witch persecutions did not just occur during the early modern period, but during the whole period of patriarchal rule). Mary Daly, Gym/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978, p. 16 (see also footnote).

151 Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 8. Ruether has written many influential texts, including: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1992; Rosemary Radford Ruether, Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005. Mary Daly, however, later changed her reformist position. In Daly, Gym/Ecology, p. 7, for example, Daly describes her term “metapatriarchal” as referring to a journey in which the women’s movement will not merely reform the patriarchy, but will transform women. According to Crosby, Daly asked, for instance, 'if there ever was, ever had been, or ever could be religious perspectives or practices outside of Judeo-Christianity which were not androcentric.' Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 9. According to Ruether, 'Daly has repudiated not only Roman Catholicism, but Christianity as a whole, as a religion of unredeemable evil.' Ruether, Gaia and God, p. 147. See also: 'Biography', Mary Daly: Radical Elemental Feminist,
religion altogether, or to revolutionise it. Waiting in the wings, by chance, was an alternative religion that, it seemed, could accommodate the needs of spiritual feminists: neo-Paganism, or, more particularly, Wicca. A religion that gave primacy to a Goddess\textsuperscript{152} must have been very appealing. As Eller observes, ‘[h]ere were people already worshiping a goddess, naming women as priestesses, and talking about “the feminine.”’\textsuperscript{153}

Johanna Stuckey asks why women were interested in spirituality at all if the monotheistic religions they had grown up in had proved to be inadequate and sexist. In regard to the consciousness-raising group that she was a part of during the late 1960s in Toronto, what were explicitly non-religious intentions, she realises, in retrospect, ‘were a combination of therapy session, discussion group, healing circle, and prayer meeting.’\textsuperscript{154} She goes on to credit the ‘success of the consciousness-raising groups’ as a major reason ‘why many feminists turned to spirituality in the mid-1970s.’\textsuperscript{155} She suggests that the Goddess worshipping groups functioned in a similar way.\textsuperscript{156}

While spiritual feminists were embracing the contemporary witchcraft religion, in parallel, non-religious feminists were adopting, for political reasons, the name “WITCH”. Groups of feminists across the USA embraced the acronym for their various political actions. Led by Robin Morgan, the first group met in New York on Halloween in 1968\textsuperscript{157} and for them the name “WITCH” stood for “Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell.” When similar covens sprang up in cities around the USA, the acronym WITCH represented different slogans depending on the particular coven and

\textsuperscript{152} Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ p. 34. The Wiccan pantheon includes a Goddess and a horned God – the latter being of secondary importance. Eller explains that while Wiccan worship of a Goddess is often coupled with the worship of a God, she has come across groups that only worship a Goddess, but she has never encountered groups that only worship a God. Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ pp. 34, 40 (footnote 3). For more information regarding the differences in deities worshipped by the various Pagan paths, see Hardman, ‘Introduction,’ pp. xii–xiii. Hardman mentions, for instance, the bitheism of Wicca.

\textsuperscript{153} Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ p. 34.

\textsuperscript{154} Stuckey, \textit{Feminist Spirituality}, p. 129.


\textsuperscript{156} Stuckey, \textit{Feminist Spirituality}, p. 130. She also proclaims that Elizabeth Gould Davis, \textit{The First Sex}, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1972, was extremely influential in what would become the ‘sacred history of Feminist Goddess Worship.’

\textsuperscript{157} Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ p. 34; Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 216.
their local political concerns. According to Robin Morgan, the WITCH members were ‘women who were self-styled “politicos” — women’s liberationists who still strongly affirmed a Marxist analysis and a hip Left style.’ These women were not interested in the witch image for religious reasons, but as a way of subverting established cultural politics when employing it theatrically at political protests. They moulded the image of the witch into ‘a symbol of female power, knowledge, independence, and martyrdom.’ As Kathryn Rountree emphasises, while the members of these covens were interested in the witch image for political reasons, not religious ones, one effect, nevertheless, was to ‘draw attention to the atrocities of the European witch-craze and the Church’s role in the witch-killings, and to spark discussions about the Goddess and the possibility of pre-Christian matriarchies.’

These historical concerns became paramount for spiritual feminists.

Wicca (also referred to as traditional or modern witchcraft), the “ready-made” religion for spiritual feminists, was not, however, entirely suitable for them. Eller explains that ‘in spite of substantial areas of shared interest, there were real differences between the newly anointed feminist Witches and neopagans of older vintage.’ Firstly, feminists ‘had no interest in sharing their circles with men, and precious little interest in worshipping a god of any sort.’ Wicca, in contrast, emphasised gender duality. As Eller explains, ‘[i]f true magic were to happen, both male and female deities had to be invoked, and according to some, both women and men had to be present, fulfilling their gender-prescribed tasks.’ Another difference concerned organisation; feminist witches placed less emphasis on structure, secrecy, and training (for instance, with

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158 Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 216. For example, it stood for “Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment”, “Women Inspired To Commit Herstory”, “Women Intent on Toppling Consumer Holidays”, to name a few.
164 Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ p. 37. Rountree, for example, claims: ‘I have never heard any mention of the God amongst feminist witches in New Zealand, and all the groups I have worked with have only women members.’ Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 217.
165 Eller, ‘The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,’ p. 38. Susan Greenwood points out that ‘Heterosexual dynamics [are seen] as a means of raising energy in the circle.’ Greenwood, ‘The Nature of the Goddess,’ p. 106. Greenwood continues: ‘it appears to be a generally held belief among Wiccans that homosexuals and lesbians cannot work magic without sexual polarity. In practice I have not met many gays or lesbians who are attracted to Wicca; they often see feminist witchcraft as a more flexible medium.’
regards to preparing for initiation). Mary Jo Neitz explains that feminist witches 'are less likely to require specific clothing or words in a ritual; they are less likely to use titles or differentiation between skill levels or experience. Feminist covens are more likely to make use of women's experiences of their bodies as in rituals marking menstruation, birthing, and menopause.'\textsuperscript{166} In feminist covens, one can be a witch simply by being female. Despite the differences, however, the cross-fertilisation between spiritual feminists and Wicca proved to be productive.\textsuperscript{167}

Cynthia Eller credits Zsuzsanna Budapest\textsuperscript{168} and Starhawk\textsuperscript{169} with building connections between feminism and Paganism.\textsuperscript{170} In 1971 Z. Budapest and some friends named themselves the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1 and celebrated the winter solstice.\textsuperscript{171} This coven expanded rapidly and others were created across the country.\textsuperscript{172} Another key figure in the movement, due to her feminist revision of the history of ancient civilisations, was Merlin Stone.\textsuperscript{173} Her quest to discover more about the ancient Goddess religion took her halfway around the world to 'libraries, museums, universities and excavation sites of the United States, Europe and the Near East.'\textsuperscript{174} Stone's

\textsuperscript{166} Neitz, 'In Goddess We Trust,' p. 367.

\textsuperscript{167} Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' p. 38.

\textsuperscript{168} Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest (usually referred to as Z. Budapest) emigrated to the USA after escaping the failing Hungarian revolution as a teenager and 'took her city's name as her own'. She was very active in the American women's movement, but noticed its need of a religion. According to Eller, '[s]he claimed to be the heir of a Witchcraft tradition at least eight hundred years old, inherited from her mother, Masika Szilagyi.' Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' pp. 35–36. According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, Z. Budapest claimed that her mother Masika had no father 'having been conceived "immaculately" in her mother's womb, without male fertilization' and that she learnt the arts of witchcraft from an old servant, who was also a witch. Ruether, Goddesses and the Divine Feminine, p. 277. See also Budapest, The Holy Book: Part One, p. 131. Z. Budapest has coined new words so as not to have the words "men" or "man" in a word that actually signifies something female or refers to both sexes. For instance, instead of "women", she uses "wimmin". Instead of "human", she uses "hummin". Instead of "woman", she uses "womon". See, for example, Budapest, The Holy Book: Part One, p. 9.


\textsuperscript{170} Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' pp. 35, 38.

\textsuperscript{171} Susan B. Anthony was a nineteenth-century women's rights leader in the USA.

\textsuperscript{172} Eller, 'The Roots of Feminist Spirituality,' p. 36. From six members in 1971 the Susan B. Anthony Coven had 700 members nine years later.

\textsuperscript{173} Merlin Stone is an art and art history teacher and a sculptor, with a strong interest in archaeology and ancient religion.

\textsuperscript{174} Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. xvi.
discoveries led to her proclaiming the existence of ancient Goddess worship.175 Her pioneering study, When God Was a Woman, was published in 1976 and describes the existence of Goddess worship in prehistoric times in Greece, and the Near and Middle East. 176 Stone explored the prehistoric worship of the Goddess in archaeological, mythological and historical sources, as well as the centuries of persecution suffered by the ancient societies at the hands of the newer religions.177 This focus inspired more interest in ancient Goddess worship, in addition to the history of witchcraft persecution, and gave the movement more credibility.178 Johanna Stuckey claims that with Stone’s book ‘[t]he new religion had its scripture, or rather the first of its sacred books.’179

Stone’s book sparked a surge of interest in, and subsequent writing on, Goddesses and Goddess worship.180 According to Dennis Carpenter, the year 1979 is often viewed as ‘a turning point in the growth of Paganism’ due to the publication of some key texts including Starhawk’s The Spiral Dance, Margot Adler’s Drawing Down the Moon, and Selena Fox’s Circle Guide to Wicca and Pagan Resources.181 Also published in that year were Z. Budapest’s The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow’s edited collection Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, and Naomi Goldenberg’s The Changing of the Gods.182 Numerous scholars and practitioners claim Starhawk’s classic The Spiral Dance to be the most influential text.183 While Z. Budapest stipulated that covens were to be women-only, Starhawk did not exclude men and, in so doing, bridged the gap between Wicca and feminist witchcraft. The different emphases of the key Goddess writers will become evident

175 She also found the language used in the scholarly work of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to have a sexual, cultural, and religious bias. For example, Goddess worship was commonly dismissed as a “cult” rather than referred to as a “religion”. Stone, When God Was a Woman, pp. xviii, xx. For example, Stone writes that “[i]n most archaeological texts the female religion is referred to as a “fertility cult””. Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. xix.
177 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. xiii.
179 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 131.
180 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 131.
182 While I do use Goldenberg’s text as a primary source, I do not focus in great depth on her work because of its emphasis on Jungian archetypal theories. The same can be said for other texts such as Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image, Viking Arkana, London, 1991. I consider their work where they engage with notions of history.
183 Janice Crosby, for example, captures the importance of Starhawk’s Spiral Dance when she points out: ‘[i]n my personal experience, I have yet to meet a self-identified neo-Pagan/Wiccan who has not read the book.’ Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 11. Kathryn Rountree claimed that ‘[b]y 2000 sales [of The Spiral Dance] had exceeded 300,000.’ Rountree, Embracing the Witch and the Goddess, p. 7.
throughout the thesis. The variations between writers highlight the fact that Goddess worship is not a homogeneous movement.

Another profoundly influential writer was the late Lithuanian-born archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, author of several books including *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images* and *The Language of the Goddess*.\(^{184}\) Her research focused on Goddess societies in prehistoric Europe and the Ancient Near East.\(^{185}\) Like Stone’s, Gimbutas’s work is used as source material, which is frequently cited by other writers of Goddess literature.\(^{186}\) Having left Christian theology, Carol Christ\(^{187}\) has been an extremely influential writer, claimed by Johanna Stuckey to be ‘the foremost thealogian of the new religion.’\(^{188}\) A large area of history that has undergone feminist revision, and has been utilised by Goddess writers, is the early-modern European witch persecutions. In the book *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English link women being persecuted as witches with the rising western medical profession, and claim that the persecuted women were actually midwives, healers and wise-women.\(^{189}\)

Although Ehrenreich and English are not Goddess writers, their publication has been particularly influential in feminist spirituality.\(^{190}\)

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\(^{184}\) The feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas’s (1921–1994) work has been a vital source of information for Goddess writers – refer to Appendix B for more details. Gimbutas fled Lithuania during WWII and emigrated to the USA after the war. See Starhawk and Donna Reid, ‘Marija Gimbutas -- Bio’, *Belili Productions*, <http://www.belili.org/marija/bio.html>, 2003 (accessed 9 May 2007), for information about Gimbutas’s background and career.

\(^{185}\) See earlier in this chapter for examples of Goddess writers influencing each other. Other writers such as Elinor Gadon, in *The Once and Future Goddess* and Gloria Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, have used the studies of other Goddess writers. Gadon, for example, tries to understand Goddess symbols in their original context, as recovered by Stone and Gimbutas. They rely on the type of history written by Stone and Gimbutas as a base from which to interpret Goddess symbols. Crosby, *Cauldrons of Changes*, p. 15.

\(^{186}\) Due to frustration with the academy, Carol Christ left an academic position in the USA and created her own institution of research and education on Lesbos in Greece. For information about Carol Christ’s background and her “Ariadne Institute”, see ‘Ariadne Institute for the Study of Myth and Ritual’, *Ariadne Institute*, <http://www.goddessariadne.org/ariadne.htm> (accessed 9 May 2007). See also Stuckey, *Feminist Spirituality*, p. 144. Italics in the original. As “thea” is the Greek word for Goddess and “theos” the Greek word for God, Naomi Goldenberg coined the term “thealogian” to differentiate scholars of feminist religions from theologians and theology. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, p. 96. For a detailed introduction to theology, see Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Theology: Discourse on the Goddess*, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 2000.


\(^{190}\) Crosby, *Cauldrons of Changes*, p. 16.
Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, British witchcraft, Gardnerian style, remained separate from spiritual feminism until the influence of Starhawk, Z. Budapest and Merlin Stone arrived from the USA in the 1980s. The cross-fertilisation that took place in the USA between witchcraft (Wicca or neo-Paganism) and feminist spirituality seems not to have occurred in Britain to the same extent. Rountree explains that when news of emerging feminist witchcraft reached Britain ‘some members (particularly male) of traditional Wiccan covens were horrified, writing off feminist witchcraft as populated by “a load of lesbians.” Others, however, such as Asphodel Long, explored the Goddess in a group known as the “The Matriarchal Study Group”, an offshoot of the London Women’s Liberation Movement. “The Matriarchal Study Group” aimed to question the ‘assumption that God had always been perceived and addressed as a male (Lord, Father, King, Son, etc.), no matter how often it was stressed that God is beyond gender’, and ‘[i]t denied the current thinking that women had always been “the subordinate sex” and linked this thinking to perception of the female in divinity’. And, as Asphodel Long stressed, ‘[b]asically it [The Matriarchal Study Group] set out to research this area in as scholarly a way as possible.’ In Britain, one woman in particular who considered the question of “who is the Goddess” was the Swedish artist and writer Monica Sjöö. In her extraordinary peripatetic life, through art, actions, workshops and writing, Sjöö was an activist against injustices associated with class, war, race, the environment and gender. Enlightened to the Goddess during

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193 Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 217. Rountree adds that this attitude highlights the homophobia and ‘fear of women’s independent power’ that was ‘entrenched’ in Gardnerian witchcraft.
197 Long, ‘The Goddess Movement in Britain Today,’ p. 14. On her memorial website, Monica Sjöö is described as a visionary artist, feminist, activist and writer; she ‘was one of the foremost artists of our times. She also was an author and pioneer feminist scholar, as well as a lifelong activist for peace, pagans, women, social justice, the environment and her beloved Mother Earth.’ Anna Fraser and Annie Johnston, ‘Welcome to Monica Sjöö’s Memorial Website!’, *Monica Sjöö (1938–2005)*, <http://www.monicasjoo.org/index.htm>, 2005 (accessed 6 May 2007).
the birth of her second son in 1961,\textsuperscript{199} Sjöö dedicated her life ‘to creating paintings that speak of women’s lives, our history and sacredness.’\textsuperscript{200} Her feminist and ecological spirituality and politics are also evident in her books, which are co-written with Barbara Mor.\textsuperscript{201}

Pagan traditions reached Australia from the UK and the USA through literature and from Pagans initiated overseas who created covens on their return. The Occult subculture that existed in Australia, in the forms of Spiritualism and Theosophy, paved the way for alternative religions such as Paganism to flourish in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{202} Likewise, Kathryn Rountree acknowledges the influence of American texts and the American feminist witchcraft movement on the development of feminist witchcraft in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{203}

Being a dynamic movement, Goddess worship has evolved over several decades. It has influenced and been particularly influenced by the broader movements of feminism and environmentalism. Interesting links, intersections and influences exist between Goddess worship and these movements’ own metahistories. The dominant themes of gender and ecology are the obvious topics to pursue in the Goddess writers’ construction of the past because, as Charlotte Hardman points out, in Paganism the divine is manifest in women and nature.\textsuperscript{204} Although gender and ecology permeate the mythistory in an interlinked manner, I am dividing the twin themes, as I elucidate the Goddess mythistory, in order to better focus, firstly, on the Goddess and women, and, secondly, on the Goddess and nature.


\textsuperscript{204} Hardman, ‘Introduction,’ p. xii.
This thesis will be arranged into six thematic chapters that will analyse the Goddess worshippers' constructions of the past in relation to gender and ecology. Part One (Chapters Two, Three and Four) will focus on gender, and Part Two (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) will focus on ecology. These two themes will be analysed in the context of three myth-historical time periods: the “Golden Age”, the “Fall”, and the Goddess “Renaissance”. Chapters Two, Three and Four will thus elucidate the three time periods, respectively, in regard to the theme of gender. Chapters Five, Six and Seven will present the same time periods, but with a focus on ecology.

In the first thematic chapter (Chapter Two) the Goddess writers’ mythistory of the “Golden Age” will be elucidated with a focus on gender. This period will be contextualised with regards to chronology and geography, and the Goddess writers’ preoccupation with time and place will be examined. This chapter will analyse the Goddess writers’ representation of the Goddess and women during this period, consider the purposes of their presentation for the overall mythistory, and explore why the movement is interested in origins at all.

Chapter Three will focus on the Goddess writers’ construction of the “Fall” period in relation to the disempowerment experienced by the Goddess and women as a result of the changes imposed on religion and society by patriarchal invaders. In the Goddess writers’ view, peaceful, cultured, matricentric societies were attacked by external forces from backward regions of south Russia. Over millennia the Goddess culture was permeated by patriarchal institutions. Despite the patriarchal conquests, Goddess writers emphasise the survival of elements of the Old Religion to support their contention that the Goddess religion endured. The early modern European witch-hunts are a centrepiece of the “Fall” narrative, exemplifying the patriarchy at its most destructive and violent. The Goddess writers’ construction of this period and their selection of sources will be analysed.

Chapter Four will highlight the mythistory of the Goddess “Renaissance” in which the Goddess and her religion are presented as (re)emerging from centuries spent underground. The (re)awakening of the Goddess is a phenomenon of recent decades

205 Thematic analyses inevitably risk some overlap between chapters because issues discussed in an early chapter may need to be raised again in a later one. Overall, however, I think that the gains of a thematic approach are greater than the losses.
and is attributed to women actively (re)creating the religion. This chapter will assess, firstly, the characteristics of the (re)awakened Goddess and her worshippers. Secondly, it will outline how devotees (re)discover and connect with the Goddess through reading histories, pilgrimages to sacred Goddess sites, viewing and creating art, and participating in rituals. It will be argued that all of these modes of connecting with the Goddess involve linking the past with the present. It will be demonstrated that this method is an unorthodox way of understanding the past. It is unmediated and direct, with similarities to indigenous understandings of place and temporality, compared to orthodox historical practice, which engages with sources in a mediated and interpretative way.

A short preface to Part Two will provide background information to the theme of ecology. Chapter Five will return to Goddess writers’ mythistory of the “Golden Age”. This time the focus will be on their understandings of pre-patriarchal peoples’ ecological consciousness. The corollary of the concept of an immanent deity embodied in the earth is that the earth was sacred. This underlying premise was fundamental to the “Golden Age” affirmation of nature and the environment; the implications will be illustrated in relation to human interaction with animals, perception of the landscape, design of the built environment, production of artworks, and honouring of the earth’s seasonal cycles at festivals. Furthermore, it will be demonstrated that in the Goddess mythistory of this pre-patriarchal period people viewed nature and the earth in particularly female anthropomorphic terms.

Chapter Six will address the mythistory of the “Fall” period and attitudes to ecology. There is a comparative dearth of information in Goddess literature on this topic for two reasons. Firstly, the wealth of evidence from archaeology, which suggests that the development of agriculture in the Neolithic period caused environmental destruction, conflicts with the Goddess mythistory, so it is not in the interests of Goddess writers to engage with this material. Secondly, a focus on ecology came late to the Goddess movement and, in the early stages of the movement’s development, was a secondary interest compared with gender. Nevertheless, emphases on ecology in Goddess literature of the “Fall” period can be found. Human relationships with the environment throughout the mediaeval period are represented as embedded in the countryside, where peasants had organic contact with the land and agricultural cycles. This was not the case in urban areas, where patriarchal religion and philosophy was firmly implanted.
By the late early modern period, however, even inhabitants in the countryside became dislocated from the land due to the introduction of enclosure, which, it is contended, arose as a response to the scientific revolution and the change from a feudal to a capitalist economy.

Chapter Seven will analyse the mythistory of the Goddess “Renaissance” period in relation to ecology. It will consider the impact the emerging Goddess religion has had on human relationships with the environment. Firstly, the importance of an immanent deity for ecological relationships will be elucidated. Secondly, the ways in which worshippers are perceived to connect to the Goddess and nature will be outlined and the importance of history in facilitating the connections highlighted. Thirdly, the chapter will consider points of connection with the broader field of ecofeminism. Finally, it will assess the support that Goddess writers seek from the unlikely field of science through James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis.

The thematic chapters will be followed by a Conclusion and two appendices. Appendix A will outline scholarly critiques of Goddess writers’ mythistory and their practice of constructing history. Scholarly studies that dismiss or discredit the Goddess movement’s representation of the past and methodology are not central to this thesis, but provide background information to it and, therefore, are located in an appendix. Appendix A will also highlight some recurring issues in the dialogue that has occurred between academia and Goddess writers, such as the “matriarchy” question and the critique of essentialism. Appendix B will outline the Goddess writers’ historical technical practice – their particular engagement with sources to support their mythistory. The discussions in Appendix B are either background information or apply to more than one chapter and, for that reason, have been given independent treatment.

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206 That is, studies by scholars that comprise the first category of publications, which were briefly introduced earlier in this chapter.
Chapter Two: A historical imaginary of a “Golden Age”: female empowerment in prehistoric Goddess cultures

From earliest times, women have been witches, *wicce*, “wise ones” – priestesses, diviners, midwives, poets, healers, and singers of songs of power. Woman-centred culture, based on the worship of the Great Goddess, underlies the beginnings of all civilization. Mother Goddess was carved on the walls of paleolithic caves, and painted in the shrines of the earliest cities, those of the Anatolian plateau. For her were raised the giant stone circles, the henges of the British Isles, the dolmens and cromlechs of the later Celtic countries, and for her the great passage graves of Ireland were dug. In her honor, sacred dancers leaped the bulls in Crete and composed lyric hymns within the colleges of the holy isles of the Mediterranean. Her mysteries were celebrated in secret rites at Eleusis, and her initiates included some of the finest minds of Greece. Her priestesses discovered and tested the healing herbs and learned the secrets of the human mind and body that allowed them to ease the pain of childbirth, to heal wounds and cure diseases, and to explore the realm of dreams and the unconscious.


Introduction

Starhawk describes a past time when women were revered for their knowledge, wisdom, and their expertise in all matters religious and secular. The excerpt above is representative of Goddess writers’ views of what shall be referred to throughout this thesis as the “Golden Age”. Starhawk credits women with discovering, creating and developing important technologies during this period. Her sweeping time frame for the “Golden Age” ranges from the Palaeolithic to Classical Greece, a period which covers approximately thirty thousand years. She implies that early societies’ focus on women and the Goddess was a universal phenomenon, although she only mentions locations that are in or near Europe, such as Anatolia, the Celtic countries, Minoan Crete and Ancient Greece. Other key elements of these early Goddess- and women-centred

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1 I am adopting the label “Golden Age” to refer to the time period in which Goddess cultures are perceived, by Goddess writers, to have flourished: that is, in the pre-patriarchal period, which is understood to incorporate the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic periods. The term “Golden Age” is now used infrequently by Goddess writers because of earlier associations of it with a matriarchy (and criticisms of this practice by some scholars – see Appendix A). Elizabeth Gould Davis, for example, viewed matriarchy as the “Golden Age” in her book *The First Sex*. I am, however, using the term “Golden Age” in this thesis, not to refer to a matriarchy, but to refer to a time in the past that is believed to have been better for women than the following centuries of reigning patriarchal religions and institutions. Some Goddess writers and scholars do use the term “Golden Age” in this sense. Diane Stein, for example, uses it to refer to ‘pre-God (goddess) civilizations’. Diane Stein, *The Women’s Spirituality Book*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1995, p. 4.
societies commonly emphasised in Goddess literature are peacefulness, equality between the sexes, respect for the earth, and an appreciation of women’s bodies and “feminine” characteristics.  

Scholars have responded to the Goddess writers’ representation of the “Golden Age” in various ways. Firstly, there is the standard criticism of historical and archaeological inaccuracies. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, criticises this version of what she terms “an original paradise” as not being objective history, as naivety, and as a projection of current values onto Neolithic societies. Furthermore, whether Goddess writers characterise the pre-patriarchal period as a matriarchy is an ongoing debate between this category of academics and Goddess writers. The Goddess writers’ representation of the Neolithic period is another contentious topic. While, on the one hand, Goddess writers depict the Neolithic period as being peaceful and the transition from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic as smooth and uneventful, there is, on the other hand, a wealth of research from archaeological and anthropological perspectives that highlights the violence and devastation of the Neolithic revolution. The archaeologist/anthropologist Joan Townsend and Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, draw on James Mellaart’s findings at the Neolithic site of Çatal Hüyük to dispute the Goddess writers’ representation of the period. 

A second significant approach is the focus on the models, methods and influences behind the Goddess writers’ construction of the pre-patriarchal period. Several scholars critically discuss the Goddess writers’ practice of situating the Goddess and this contemporary movement in the past. Juliette Wood, for instance, suggests that it

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2 These emphases are exemplified by Riane Eisler in the following excerpt: ‘[b]ut, unlike our societies, they were not warlike. They were not societies where women were subordinate to men. And they did not see our Earth as an object for exploitation and domination. ... [these were societies] ... where women and “feminine” values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence were not subordinate to men and the so-called masculine values of conquest and domination. Rather the life-giving powers incarnated in women’s bodies were given the highest social value.’ Riane Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto,’ in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (eds) Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990, pp. 23–34. Italics in original.

3 See Chapter One for a list of academics in this category and Appendix A for further details.


5 Rosemary Radford Ruether, Cynthia Eller, Philip Davis and Sally Binford, for example, all allege that Goddess writers are promoting the view of a pre-patriarchal matriarchy. See Appendix A for a discussion of the “matriarchy” issue.

provides an apparently factual and secure basis for revival." Helen Berger points out that a perceived "antiquity of practice" is important, firstly, because it enables a group to differentiate itself from other new religions, particularly from those originating in gurus. Secondly, the older a religion is, the more legitimate it appears to be. To be the oldest religion, then, is most desirable. To base the Goddess movement in the past requires the re-writing of history. Such a project, according to Janice Crosby, "allows women a new factual basis from which to reimagine themselves." Re-visioning the past, therefore, is a necessary step in re-visioning women's futures. Likewise, Graham Harvey stresses the importance for the Goddess spirituality movement of 'research about and reclamation of history.'

The Goddess writers' piecemeal references to time and locations has been commented on by some scholars. Wood, for example, observes that Goddess writers refer to different periods and cultures in the past without contextualising the relationship between the different pieces of information or providing a timeline. She criticises this practice because, as she explains, '[s]imilarity of form across culture and through time does not necessarily mean similarity of function'. Berger also addresses the issue and explains how movements of modernity such as Wicca disconnect time and space from a particular location; as a result of presenting an overarching narrative, time and place become universalised.

Another important discussion concerns the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sources that Goddess writers use to support their mythistory of the "Golden Age". According to Juliette Wood, Goddess worshippers are not unusual and actually

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9 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 22.
11 Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes, p. 17.
12 Graham Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 1997, p. 72.
15 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 7. According to Berger, '[t]ime and space are no longer connected to a particular location or set of activities, but they become universalised with global time zones, calendars, and maps. ... It is the disembedding of symbolic systems from time and space that provides the context in which Witches can borrow rituals, deities, and magical practices from around the globe. ... spirituality ... become[ss] expert systems that can be disembedded from a particular historical time or place.'
resemble nineteenth-century models of culture 'in their use of archaeology and anthropology' and 'in the assumptions they draw about early society'. Likewise, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Diane Purkiss, Kate Rigby, and Ronald Hutton suggest that the Goddess mythistory of the "Golden Age" is influenced by nineteenth and early-twentieth-century archaeologists, mythographers and anthropologists, such as J.J. Bachofen, Sir James Frazer, Sir Arthur Evans, Jane Ellen Harrison, Erich Neumann and Robert Graves. Ideas, such as the notion of a "Golden Age", an original matriarchy, a single great Goddess, and of the earliest societies being woman-centred, for instance, can be traced to nineteenth-century theories, and to twentieth-century theories, for example, by Graves and Neumann. Diane Purkiss takes the argument further and contends that the Goddess movement has been heavily influenced by men, who were writing early in the twentieth century and who were not concerned about empowering women.

The Goddess writers' construction of the mythistory raises the following key issues, which I will address in this chapter. Firstly, Goddess writers' provocative view of the Neolithic period will be considered with an aim to understanding the purposes of such a construction for their mythistory. Secondly, observations about the importance of re-

18 According to Ronald Hutton, the German classicist Eduard Gerhard is credited with suggesting in 1849 that a single great Goddess stood behind the various Goddesses of ancient Greece and represented mother earth. In 1862 the Swiss judge J.J. (Johann Jakob) Bachofen put forward the notion that the earliest societies were woman-centred and that this arrangement would have been mirrored in religion. Bachofen's theory, however, was not embraced until the turn of the century when Sir Arthur Evans's discoveries at Knossos in 1901 led to him claiming that prehistoric Crete practiced Goddess worship (of a single Goddess). The Cambridge classicist Jane Ellen Harrison also argued for a single original Goddess and added that male deities were subordinate to the Goddess. In the early twentieth century, Sir James Frazer yielded to the topic of ancient Goddesses and advanced the theory of a pan-European prehistoric double (mother and daughter) Goddess. Hutton explains that by the 1910s it was a standard claim in textbooks that in prehistoric religion the great Goddess was worshipped. Hutton, The Triumph of the Moon, pp. 35–37. See also Ronald Hutton, 'The Discovery of the Modern Goddess,' in Joanne Pearson, Richard H. Roberts, and Geoffrey Samuel (eds), Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998, p. 93. Hutton explains that the nineteenth-century archaeologists promoting the idea of a single great Goddess were influenced by the German Romantics of the eighteenth century as well as by British writers.
20 Purkiss, 'Women's Rewriting of Myth,' p. 442.
writing history and basing the contemporary movement in the past are extremely pertinent for considering why Goddess writers are interested in origins at all. This practice serves, for instance, to validate their movement and prove its longevity; other reasons will be illuminated throughout the chapter as the mythistory is elucidated. It will become evident that this Goddess mythistory challenges history, archaeology, religion and feminism. Thirdly, Goddess writers’ preoccupation with chronology and geography will be explored; and questions of inconsistencies and Eurocentrism, which have been raised by scholars, will be considered. Finally, Purkiss’s contention about the importance of male writers for the revival of the Goddess movement will be assessed.

This first thematic chapter will primarily examine Goddess writers’ historical imaginaries of the “Golden Age” and, in the process, consider the type of religion and society that the writers present, with a particular focus on the respect women are believed to have enjoyed. It will analyse the particular constructions of women, society and religion and consider what, or who, the representations may challenge, empower, or disempower, in relation to issues of gender. While the key Goddess writers have a common vision of this Goddess worshipping, women-centred era, they also have points of divergence. Taking the body of Goddess literature concerned with the “Golden Age” and issues of gender into account, as well as the aforementioned arguments, this chapter will be structured in the following way. Firstly, it will commence with a discussion of time and location and consider the emphasis placed on when the “Golden Age” is believed to have occurred and why certain locations appear in the Goddess literature while others are curiously absent. Secondly, the views Goddess writers have concerning the nature of the Goddess – whether, for instance, her worship was polytheistic or monotheistic – along with her traits, and the skills and inventions that she inspired, will be examined. The third section will consider the implications for women and society of a female deity in power.

I. Chronology and geography

Goddess literature abounds with references to when and where Goddess religion was practised. This section will elucidate the chronology and geography of Goddess worship in order to locate and contextualise the “Golden Age” societies that are

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21 See Chapter One for a description of the primary sources that will be used in this thesis.
represented in Goddess literature. It will assess patterns or inconsistencies in the times and locations that Goddess writers incorporate into their mythistory and, most importantly, consider the purpose and implications of specifying dates and places for their mythistory. It will demonstrate that the Goddess writers’ preoccupation with geography and chronology serves to give the movement legitimacy by proving that it not only has prehistoric origins and predates patriarchal religion, but that it has existed for a long time compared with patriarchal religions.

**When was the “Golden Age” and do dates matter?**

Goddess writers’ references to when the “Golden Age” occurred vary from being vague and general to being quite specific. Starhawk speaks for most Goddess writers in declaring that witchcraft is older than the major world religions.22 She states that it is ‘perhaps the oldest religion extant in the West. Its origins go back before Christianity, Judaism, Islam – before Buddhism and Hinduism’.23 Diane Stein takes such claims even further. She contends, for example, that ‘[t]he goddess religion goes back to the beginning, not only of feminism but of time. Before the institutional Protestant or Catholic churches, before Judaism, before Islam or classical Greece, before there was God or gods, there was the goddess, the great mother.’24 It must be said that Stein’s “beginning of time” claim is not reiterated by the majority of Goddess writers. While Starhawk and Stein do not specify dates, their purpose is to emphasise their belief that Goddess worship is the oldest religion. Like Stein, Z. Budapest is unspecific when defining the age of Goddess religion. On the one hand, she admits that they do not know how old Goddess worship is. On the other hand, she uses her intuition and reflects that ‘it feels very ancient.’25 Again, the suggestion here is that the religion has roots in a distant past.

Being more specific than Stein and Budapest, Carol Christ suggests that Goddess worship goes back to the Neolithic, possibly to the Palaeolithic, which she categorises

22 Note that Starhawk, as is common in Goddess literature, equates “witchcraft” with “Goddess religion” and the “Old Religion”. Her quote in the text, for instance, comes from a chapter entitled, ‘Witchcraft as Goddess Religion’. These terms, therefore, may appear interchangeably throughout the thesis. See Chapter One for a discussion of the meanings of the different terms.


as spanning from 32 000 until 10 000 BCE.\textsuperscript{26} It can be deduced from the dates that Christ mentions that what she refers to as the Palaeolithic is, more precisely, the Upper Palaeolithic.\textsuperscript{27} Her suggestion of the possibility of finding Goddess worship origins as far back as 32 000 BCE (the Upper Palaeolithic) is reiterated by a number of Goddess writers such as Marija Gimbutas and Elinor Gadon. For example, Gadon claims that

\begin{quote}
[The Goddess religion flowered in Europe and the Near East from the Palaeolithic into the Late Classical Age. The story is very complex, concerned as it is with an enormous time span encompassing more than 30,000 years of human history and taking in the vast Eurasian land mass.\textsuperscript{28}]
\end{quote}

Despite using the broader term Palaeolithic, Gadon, like Christ, is more specifically referring to the Upper Palaeolithic, illustrated by her figure of 30 000 years. Regardless of the labels they use, most writers actually imply that the starting point for Goddess religion is in the Upper Palaeolithic or the Neolithic. Gimbutas believes that the Goddess ruled in Europe 'throughout the Palaeolithic and Neolithic, and in Mediterranean Europe throughout most of the Bronze Age.'\textsuperscript{29} In the Goddess optic, the Bronze Age is often associated with weapons and the patriarchal Indo-European conquest of Goddess societies. On Mediterranean islands such as Crete, however, woman-centred and Goddess culture supposedly continued and flourished during this period,\textsuperscript{30} due perhaps to the island's isolation. This representation of Goddess worship in Minoan Crete is not original to Goddess writers; it can be traced to Sir Arthur Evans's theories advanced at the turn of the nineteenth century and originating from his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} According to the palaeo-anthropologist Margaret Ehrenberg, the Palaeolithic is marked by a hunter-gatherer form of subsistence. Margaret Ehrenberg, \textit{Women in Prehistory}, British Museum Publications, London, 1989, p. 176. The Upper Palaeolithic extends from 30 000 years ago until the beginning of the Neolithic. It was a time when Homo sapiens sapiens was the only human subspecies on earth. By then the previous subspecies, such as the Neanderthals, had become extinct. The Upper Palaeolithic is the last period of the Old Stone Age – the other two periods are the Lower Palaeolithic (encompasses the earliest humans) and the Middle Palaeolithic (covers the era of Neanderthal humans). The Upper Palaeolithic ends with the last Ice Age around 8 500 years ago. The Neolithic (New Stone Age) revolution is characterised by the introduction of agriculture. Textbook history and anthropological writing on the Neolithic acknowledges that increased populations led to larger communities, a scarcity of land, as well as the need to protect city-states from neighbours. The Neolithic culminates with the Bronze Age. The Neolithic is also known for 'the earliest use of pottery and ground stone tools, and a sedentary lifestyle.' Ehrenberg, \textit{Women in Prehistory}, p. 176.
\item \textsuperscript{30} It is also important to realise that all of Europe did not experience prehistory or the Neolithic revolution at the same time. The term prehistory is applied to particular areas when they did not have a written culture, so areas in Northern Europe are categorised as prehistoric until later than areas in Eastern Europe and the Near East. Ehrenberg, \textit{Women in Prehistory}, p. 21. Similarly, the Neolithic occurred later in Western Europe and the British Isles than it did in the east. It is said to have started in the Near East, for example, around 8 000 years ago but not to have commenced for another four millennia in North West Europe.
\end{itemize}
discoveries at the palace of Knossos. The dates and prehistorical periods that Goddess writers such as Christ, Gadon and Gimbutas refer to are of interest because their suggestions (for instance, of peaceful Goddess societies existing during the Neolithic period) are sometimes in stark contrast to the work of archaeologists and historians. It could be argued, therefore, that Goddess writers are more concerned with depicting their roots in order to claim longevity and ancient origins for their movement than with the implications of disputing a large body of archaeological and historical work.

Goddess writers incorporate dates in their narrative in order to prove the movement's longevity, rather than for the purpose of historical accuracy. Starhawk, for example, claims that "[a]ccording to our legends, Witchcraft began more than 35 thousand years ago, when the temperature of Europe began to drop and the great sheets of ice crept slowly south in their last advance." This comment is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, to consider a time 'more than 35 000 years ago' is to imply that Goddess religion was first practiced by the Neanderthal subspecies. Our own subspecies of Homo sapiens sapiens emerged about 30 000 years ago, as the Neanderthals were becoming extinct. Secondly, Starhawk is suggesting that the last Ice Age began sometime before 35 000 years ago. The last glacial period is believed to have started about 100 000 years ago, which is millennia before her estimation. This example highlights the lack of concern that some Goddess writers have with detail. On the one hand, dates hardly matter. On the other hand, dates are extremely important in designating the great antiquity of Goddess worship. The use of dates, regardless of whether they are accurate or not, imbues the mythistory with authority. In the end, though, the narrative is more important than the dates.

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32 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 3. When Starhawk refers to "our legends", I infer that she means "according to the oral history of the religion", because, in footnote 1, p. 15, she refers to the 'Craft oral tradition'.

33 The only other reference to "Neanderthals" that I have come across in the primary sources is by Carol Christ. In the context of speculating on the meaning of the body position at death, she discussed the Neanderthals' religious beliefs. Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, Routledge, New York & London, 1997, pp. 50–51.

34 By saying "more than" 35 000 years ago, Starhawk literally could be referring to 100 000 years ago. However, she explains elsewhere that Goddess religion 'held sway for 30 thousand years' before it 'was changed to conform to the values of the conquering patriarchies', suggesting that she believes Goddess religion started closer to 35 000 years ago, than closer to 100 000 years ago. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 4.
In contrast to most descriptions by Goddess writers, Merlin Stone succinctly describes the time period with which most Goddess writers are actually concerned. In the preface to *When God was a Woman*, Stone is precise with dates and terms. She explains, for instance, that

> [i]n prehistoric and early historic periods of human development, religions existed in which people revered their supreme creator as female. The Great Goddess – The Divine Ancestress – had been worshiped from the beginnings of the Neolithic periods of 7000 BC until the closing of the last Goddess temples, about AD 500. Some authorities would extend Goddess worship as far into the past as the Upper Paleolithic Age of about 25,000 BC.\(^35\)

Regardless of the method, most key figures agree that the “Golden Age” was a period that commenced with the emergence of Goddess religion. It is described as lasting until it was destroyed or forced underground by patriarchal cultures.

One reason why Goddess writers are concerned with dates of origin at all is to emphasise that their religion existed before the traditional monotheistic religions, and to show that, in the grand scheme of prehistory and history, the newer patriarchal monotheistic religions have existed for a relatively short period of time. Riane Eisler presents this perspective in her view that ‘[o]ne fascinating discovery about our past is that for millennia – a span of time many times longer than the 5,000 years conventionally counted as history – prehistoric societies worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality, our great Mother, the giver of life and creator of all.’\(^36\) Elinor Gadon illustrates the same point. She reflects that ‘[i]t is useful to put the ascendancy of the male god, of patriarchy, over the Goddess into perspective ... The concept of monotheism is a relatively recent one, first expressed by the ancient Hebrews less than 4,000 years ago.’\(^37\) Similarly, Merlin Stone emphasises the relatively recent advent of Judaism and Christianity. After suggesting that the Goddess had been worshipped from 7 000 BC until AD 500 she adds the comment that ‘events of the Bible, which we are generally taught to think of as taking place “in the beginning of time,” actually occurred in historic periods.’\(^38\) Likewise, Carol Christ journeys back through the prehistoric and historic time-periods to emphasise Goddess religions’ longevity prior to patriarchal religions. She remarks that

\(^37\) Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. xiv.
the image of Lady of the Animals goes back much further than the classical age of Greece (fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.), much further back than Homer (before 700 B.C.E.). She goes back to prehistory, certainly to the Neolithic era (began c. 9000 B.C.E. in the Near East), if not to the Paleolithic (32,000–10,000 B.C.E.).

While the dates and labels that Goddess writers employ may at times be questionable, their emphasis is on the contention that Goddess religions were in existence for millennia before the emergence of traditional patriarchal religions, and were, in fact, the first religion. To have a religion of such longevity provides a group with a sense of history (or prehistory) and tradition, as well as validity, purpose and a model for the future. It also gives the Goddess movement a sense of legitimacy. This deduction reflects the traditional assumption that the antiquity of an item grants it authority.

Locating the “Golden Age”: why does geography matter?

As antiquity is important for gaining authority, location and universality also matter. The following section will consider where the “Golden Age” is alleged to have occurred and ascertain the reasons behind the predominant focus on Europe and the Near East. Goddess writers are ambiguous and differ from each other when defining the locations of prehistoric Goddess societies. On the one hand, they mention or imply the universality of Goddess cultures. Diane Stein, for example, states that

[i]n every culture and civilization on every part of the earth, she was worshipped as the source of life, and women were reverenced as her birth-giving image. ...

Not restricted to the Near East, the so-called “cradle of civilization”, the Golden Age triad of goddess worship, matriarchy and peace extended to Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, Crete, Persia, Britain and Ireland, and to Africa.

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39 Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, pp. 165–166. Likewise, Stone includes dates in her descriptions. See, for example, Merlin Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1979, p. 124. Even though Christ has used the term “prehistory” in the quote above, she dislikes the label because she finds that it privileges “history”, and cultures and religions that are considered “historical” rather than “prehistorical”. She explains that “[t]he terms history and prehistory themselves, rather than being descriptive, reflect bias in favor of the written word. Where there is no text, we have no history it is said but only a prelude to history. This naming serves to diminish the importance of prehistory, almost to render it nondata. I suggest that we abandon the term prehistory and speak rather of early or ancient history or use the descriptive terms Paleolithic and Neolithic.” Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 74. Italics in original.

40 Interestingly, this understanding of history is vastly different to that of feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir, for instance, maintained that, with rare exceptions, “[t]hroughout history they [women] have always been subordinated to men”. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, Picador, London, 1988, p. 18.


42 The sense that antiquity lends authority contrasts with modernist thinking, which gives newness and innovation authority.

Interestingly, however, when specifically listing locations Stein omits East Asia, the Americas, and large areas of Europe, such as the western part of the continent and Scandinavia. Elinor Gadon, however, implies that Goddess worship occurred across Eurasia, from the Pyrenees to Siberia. When discussing the Lady of the Animals (a reference to the Goddess), Carol Christ claims that she ‘is found in almost all cultures.’ On the other hand, and despite references to universality, Goddess writers actually focus on Europe (particularly Eastern Europe and Greece) and the Near East (particularly Anatolia). Starhawk’s reference to universality in the opening quotation of this chapter, for instance, is soon eclipsed by the examples that she presents of Goddess religion in Europe and Anatolia. In another example, in which Starhawk considers the beginning of Goddess worship, she makes reference to the temperature in Europe without mention of other continents. In these examples, the writers endeavour to be universal, but actually focus predominantly on Europe. Like the Goddess writers’ focus on antiquity, their attempt at universality also reflects the traditional idea about the authority of religions.

In contrast, research by the late Marija Gimbutas was, from the outset, explicitly focused on Europe (mainly south-east Europe). In her book *The Language of the Goddess* she sought ‘to identify the Old European patterns that cross the boundaries of time and space.’ She catalogued a wealth of artefacts, from the Upper Palaeolithic through to Bronze Age Crete, from sites like well-known Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia and the temples and tombs of Malta, as well as from her excavations at Achilleion, Thessaly, Neolithic burial sites along the Danube, and discoveries in Bulgaria, Romania, Moldavia, and western Ukraine. When considering the role of the Goddess in prehistoric cultures Gimbutas is critical of simplistic practices that seek affirming instances from around the world. Instead, Gimbutas claimed to have rigorously focused her work on European evidence. The implication of Gimbutas’s point of view

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46 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 3.
50 Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. xvi. Gimbutas was interested in discovering Europe’s “first civilisation” and coined the term “Old Europe” to refer to this Goddess- and women-centred culture that supposedly existed in Europe until the takeover by patriarchal warriors – whom she also refers to as Indo-Europeans. The term “Old Europe” differentiates between the first European civilisation and the succeeding one. Gimbutas explained her development of the term as follows: ‘[w]ith the growing
is that her approach enabled her work to be more thorough, systematic and contextually.

Highly reliant on Gimbutas for evidence, in The Once and Future Goddess Elinor Gadon also focuses on Europe and the Near East. Gadon traces the origins of western culture to the lost Goddess prehistoric cultures. She commences, for example, with the last Ice Age and comprehensively describes the Goddess cultures of Catal Hüyük, Old Europe, Malta, Avebury and Crete.51 Gadon evokes a sense of continuity through time and geography (across Europe and Anatolia), by linking the Palaeolithic, Old Europe and Ancient Greece.

Carol Christ points out that civilisations like Gimbutas's Old Europe are likely to have developed on other continents as well.52 For various reasons, however, Goddess writers overwhelmingly focus on Europe and Anatolia. Firstly, with such a broad time period, which ranges from the Upper Palaeolithic, through the Neolithic and, in some cases, into the Bronze Age, it is an enormous task in itself to depict Europe and the Near East, let alone the whole world. Secondly, while the focus on Europe may attract accusations of Eurocentrism, the fact that Goddess writers tend to concentrate on Europe and search for the origins of Western civilisation shows that at least they are not appropriating realization of the necessity to distinguish the Neolithic and Copper Age pre-Indo-European civilization from the Indo-Europeanized Europe of the Bronze Age, I coined, ten years ago, the new term "Old Europe." The term covers, in a broad sense, all Europe west of the Pontic steppe before the series of incursions of the steppe (or "Kurgan") pastoralists in the second half of the fifth, the fourth, and the beginning of the third millennium B.C.E., for in my view Europe is not the homeland of the Indo-European speakers. In a narrower sense, the term Old Europe applies to Europe's first civilization, i.e., the highest Neolithic and Copper Age culture, which was focused in the southeast and the Danubian basin and was gradually destroyed by repeated Kurgan infiltrations.' Marija Gimbutas, 'Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe,' in Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (eds), Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1989, p. 63. In describing "Old Europe" Gimbutas refers to a pan-European Neolithic/Chalcolithic civilization that extended as far east as western Ukraine.

51 She outlines the locations that she is concerned with as follows: 'Old Europe with its more than three thousand settlements was the link between the Paleolithic and Greek cultures on which Western civilization is based. ... Geographically, Old Europe extended from the Adriatic to the Aegean, including the islands, and as far to the north as Czechoslovakia, southern Poland, and the western Ukraine. This area, opened up archaeologically since World War II, has pushed back our knowledge of European culture three to four thousand years.' Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 40. This description is very similar to Carol Christ's summary of Marija Gimbutas's study of Old Europe. Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 168. These similarities show how influential Gimbutas's work has been in Goddess literature.

52 Christ explains that '[t]here is reason to believe that Neolithic-Chalcolithic cultures developed along similar lines in other parts of the world, including for example, Africa, China, the Indus Valley, and the Americas.' Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 168.
cultures other than their own. Perhaps it would have been wiser if, from the outset, Goddess writers clarified their intention not to cover the whole world. While the gestures of universality cannot be validated, they, on the one hand, support the overall mythistory. On the other hand, they are potentially harmful, because it is these comments that suggest that the origins of the European Goddess cultures can be seen to stand for the origins of Goddess cultures throughout the world, which is, of course, not the case. This dual emphasis on specific locations and on universalism is one of the many ambiguities to arise in Goddess literature.

It is evident that particular locations in central and eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and Anatolia stand out in the Goddess mythistory. Although some writers, such as Gimbutas, Eisler and Budapest, come from non-English backgrounds, most writers have written their texts in an English speaking context and studied or worked in English-speaking universities. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theories of the existence of a Great Goddess in the Balkans and the Levant have inflected English-speaking anthropology, archaeology and history and, as a result, have infiltrated Goddess literature. Therefore, the influence of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century ideas can be seen as a major reason for the focus on Europe in Goddess literature.

Goddess writers believe that in the pre-patriarchal, pre-Indo-European period societies worshipped female deities. Thus, a Goddess religion had existed for possibly nearly 30,000 years in Europe and the Near East before the advent of dominant male sky gods and of, later, monotheistic patriarchal religions. The following section will elucidate the nature of the Goddess along with the developments with which she is credited.

II. The Goddess of the “Golden Age”: her nature and characteristics

Goddess writers present the Goddess in various and sometimes conflicting ways: as simultaneously monotheistic and polytheistic; as transcendent and immanent; as a single deity or alongside an inferior God consort. She is revered as the “creator” of life and for bestowing the “mysteries” of the processes involved in inventions such as...

It is surprising, given that a large percentage of the contemporary Goddess worshipping audience would be North American, and that the contemporary practitioners incorporate American indigenous religious practices into their contemporary practice, that Native American locations are largely absent from the “Golden Age” representation. I would suggest that Goddess writers are, firstly, aware of the problems of appropriating other cultures, and, secondly, are interested in tracing their roots in western civilisation.
agriculture and pottery. The following section will, firstly, consider the nature of the deity, endeavour to explain some of the ambiguities in Goddess writers’ descriptions of her, and consider how the apparent inconsistencies in the perceptions serve the Goddess mythistory. Secondly, this section will outline the Goddess’s role in the significant discoveries, developments and inventions of the “Golden Age”.

A single deity across cultures

Despite the various representations of the Goddess in the “Golden Age”, she is overwhelmingly depicted as a single deity across cultures. Marija Gimbutas claims that in the Upper Palaeolithic her ‘manifestations are manifold: she may be anthropomorphic or zoomorphic; she may appear in a triple aspect; she may be a waterfowl or a bird of prey, a harmless or a poisonous snake; but ultimately she is one indivisible Goddess.’54 Despite her numerous names, aspects, and traits, Goddess writers stress that the Goddess is at the same time a single deity.55 As Riane Eisler explains, ‘[i]t was polytheistic in the sense that she was worshiped under different names and in different forms. But it was also monotheistic – in the sense that we can properly speak of faith in the Goddess in the same way we speak of faith in God as a transcending entity.’56 In this sense, Goddess writers understand the deity in both a polytheistic and a monotheistic way.57 Eisler also emphasises the representation of the Goddess across cultures. Likewise, Elinor Gadon implies that even though the Goddess was given different names in different times and locations, she had the same characteristics everywhere.58 In addition, Goddess writers understand the three aspects of the deity

54 Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 316.
58 She claims, for instance, that ‘[i]n the names in other Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures may have been different, but the basic personae were the same as in Catal Hüyük.’ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 29.
(virgin, mother, and crone) to unite and represent the one Goddess. The consensus, then, is that despite the different names given to the deity, ‘throughout human history, she is ultimately one supreme reality’. According to Gadon, she only became a myriad of Goddesses when the sky gods later fractured her identity. It can be argued, then, that it is important to the Goddess mythistory that the same single deity be identified across cultures and times. Furthermore, a single deity is easier to recognise across cultures than trying to find resemblances between pantheons of deities. Goddess writers’ practice of acknowledging differences between Goddesses and yet conflating the many into the one supreme Goddess is a fascinating approach. This perspective reveals a point of contact that Goddess writers had with the broader context of second-wave feminism in which they were writing. For the Goddess writers, all Goddesses equal one Goddess. Similarly, the 1970s essentialist feminist view was that all women equalled one woman, thus placing emphasis on women’s similar experiences, rather than on their differences.

The fact that Goddess worship is often described simultaneously as polytheistic and monotheistic appears to be contradictory, yet in Goddess literature this apparent contradiction is not problematic; it is necessary. Encompassing all religious possibilities serves many purposes. On the one hand, a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society would presumably demand a non-hierarchical religious pantheon; the emphasis on polytheistic characteristics fulfils this requirement. On the other hand, the pantheon can also be conceived as hierarchical; if a male god is mentioned, which occurs infrequently, he is always inferior to the Goddess; thus there is a hierarchy in which the Goddess enjoys the superior position. When the Goddess is presented monotheistically, however, writers stress that this form of monotheism is not simply the same as the transcendent, monotheistic God of Judeo-Christian religions; the monotheistic Goddess is, at the same time, immanent, seen pantheistically and polytheistically.

59 See, for instance: Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 29.
60 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. xii. Diane Stein explains, rather simplistically, that the one Goddess with many faces has different appearances in different cultures. For instance, she claims that ‘[t]he Goddess was (and is) black skinned in Africa, brown skinned in India, yellow skinned in Asia, red skinned in Native America, and white skinned in Europe.’ Diane Stein, Casting the Circle: A Women’s Book of Ritual, The Crossing Press, Freedom, California, 1990, p. 2.
61 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. xii.
63 The concept of an immanent deity is mentioned briefly in Chapter One, Section II, and discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
Most Goddess writers focus on the female deity and omit any mention of a male deity. If a god is mentioned at all in the literature, it is usually to highlight his inferior position in relation to the Goddess. Gimbutas, for instance, includes gods in an account, only to stress their insignificant roles. She observes that

[a] matrifocal society is reflected by the Old European manifestations of the Goddess and Her worship. It is obvious that the Goddess, not gods, dominated the Old European pantheon; the Goddess ruled absolutely over human, animal, and plant life. The Goddess, not gods, spontaneously generated the life-force and created the universe. As demonstrated by the thousands of figurines and temples from the Neolithic through the Copper Ages, the male god was an adjunct of the female Goddess, as consort or son.64

According to Gimbutas, the Goddess was undoubtedly autonomous and held ultimate power.65 Likewise, Riane Eisler emphasises male gods’ lesser roles. She claims that, ‘there is overwhelming evidence that while both female and male deities were worshipped in these societies, the highest power in the universe was seen as the feminine power to give and sustain life’.66 There are certainly differences between Goddess writers as to whether they stress that only a Goddess was worshipped, as most writers imply, or both a Goddess and god, as Eisler claims. Jungians, such as Erich Neumann, have asserted the existence of the primordial parents, the Great Mother and Great Father.67 Gimbutas responded to this hypothesis by claiming that in her archaeological research ‘[t]here is no trace of a father figure in any of the Paleolithic periods. The life-creating power seems to have been of the Great Goddess alone.’68 Furthermore, Jungians divide the Great Mother figure into a Good and Terrible Mother. Goddess writers do not adopt this polar opposition. They believe in the three aspects of the Goddess: the virgin, the mother, and the crone, all of which combine to represent the Goddess’s life cycle and mirror that of women’s stages of life and the cycles of the seasons.69

It is in the interest of Goddess writers to present their religion as non-hierarchical, because they would not want to be accused of promoting sexism in religion. The apparent monotheism of Goddess worship is downplayed and the Goddess’s

64 Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 65.
65 Similarly, Starhawk points out that the first societies worshipped the Goddess. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics, Beacon Press, Boston, 1982, p. 10.
67 Discussed in Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 316.
69 Gimbutas declares that ‘[a] complete division into a “good” and a “terrible” Mother never occurred: the Life Giver and the Death Wielder are one deity.’ Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 316.
Immanence, three aspects, and myriad of manifestations are emphasised to stress the
difference between Goddess worship and religions with a transcendent monotheistic
deity. Furthermore, the Goddess’s characteristics serve to differentiate her from the
transcendent God of later religions.

The Goddess’s traits, skills and inventions
The Goddess of the “Golden Age” is credited with special knowledges and powers with
regard to creating the world and its beings, healing, and holding the mysteries of life
cycles. The following will outline, firstly, the meanings interpreted from the
representations of the Goddess and, secondly, the key inventions and skills that she
empowers her devotees to accomplish. The latter are wide-ranging and as they precede
patriarchal religion the implication is that few aspects of culture remained to be
engendered by patriarchal deities.

Several Goddess writers infer the characteristics of the Goddess from studies of
figurines, symbols and artefacts. Commencing with the Ice Age, Elinor Gadon
understands the Upper Paleolithic as a ““revolutionary” period in human evolution’ due
to a ‘virtual explosion of symbolic behaviour’. Gadon assessed the numerous female
figurines that have been discovered across Eurasia and found most to be ‘almost always
faceless’ with ‘an emphasis on those parts of the female body associated with
reproduction.’ Anne Barstow considered studies of figurines found across cultures in
prehistoric times and, similarly, concluded that the Goddess was often represented as
faceless. She interprets this practice as an effort to ‘accentuate her [the Goddess’s]
universality, her ability to “stand for” the power of the female.’ Barstow also
describes the female figurines as being big-breasted, or displaying their breasts, and
often with ample belly and buttocks, ‘as if the very plenitude of her body would ensure
plentiful crops and herds.’ While the meanings deciphered from the figurines of
pregnant and nursing Goddesses are related to reproduction and fertility, and are
particularly essentialist traits, there were also other representations that are perceived to
have emphasised the Goddess’s sexual powers, and her connections, for example, to the
arts. Barstow concludes from the representations that ‘regardless of manifestation or

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70 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 3.
71 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, pp. 5–6. See, for example, the Willendorf figure.
setting, it is clear that she was seen as a chief magical source of power, both spiritual and material.\textsuperscript{75} The Goddess, therefore, is represented as a well-rounded (literally and metaphorically) deity.

In the Goddess mythistory, the Goddess, or particular Goddesses, are often believed to have been responsible for inspiring key developments, not the least of which is the creation of the world, and for exhibiting a range of exemplary skills and characteristics. According to several Goddess writers, in the early Goddess societies people understood the beginning of the universe in terms of the female deity giving birth to the cosmos.\textsuperscript{76} According to Merlin Stone there are 'numerous accounts of the female Creators of all existence, divinities who were credited with bringing forth not only the first people but the entire earth and the heavens above. There were records of such Goddesses in Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, Africa, Australia, and China.'\textsuperscript{77} Diane Stein attributes to the Goddess not only a role in creation, but claims that she is religion. Stein proclaims, for example, that '[i]n her thousand names and herstories, she is universal, and is the undeniable root of all religions and the concept of religion itself.'\textsuperscript{78} Merlin Stone explains various Goddess attributes, as well as technologies and skills for which she and her various manifestations were patrons. According to Stone, '[i]n India, the Goddess Sarasvati was honored as the inventor of the original alphabet, while in Celtic Ireland the Goddess Brigit was esteemed as the patron deity of language.'\textsuperscript{79} In Ancient Greece the myth of Demeter and Persephone explained the annual agricultural cycle and Demeter, particularly, was hailed as the patroness of agriculture. Stone also claims that Goddesses were universally renowned 'as healers, dispensers of curative herbs, roots, plants, and other medical aids, casting the priestesses who attended the shrines into the role of physicians of those who worshipped there.'\textsuperscript{80} Goddesses are also presented as being renowned for their intelligence and wisdom. Stone claims that 'nearly everywhere the Goddess was revered as wise counsellor and prophetess.'\textsuperscript{81} In some legends the Goddess was even described as 'a powerful, courageous warrior, a leader in

\textsuperscript{75} Barstow, 'The Prehistoric Goddess,' p. 8.
\textsuperscript{77} Stone, 'When God Was a Woman,' p. 121.
\textsuperscript{78} Stein, \textit{The Women's Spirituality Book}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{79} Stone, 'When God Was a Woman,' p. 121.
\textsuperscript{80} Stone, 'When God Was a Woman,' p. 122.
\textsuperscript{81} Stone, 'When God Was a Woman,' p. 122.
battle.' Unsurprisingly, this last image does not generally feature in Goddess literature as it would contradict the depiction of Goddess societies as peaceful. It does, however, support the contention that the Goddess has capacities of intellect, wisdom, courage and leadership. Overall, therefore, the Goddess is presented as conferring a multitudinous array of skills. As a consequence, she would have been the perfect exemplar, leader and inspiration for women and their social realities in Goddess societies.

III. Mirroring the Goddess: the ramifications for women and society of a female deity

Women’s roles in the “Golden Age” are presented in Goddess literature as mirroring their deity’s: as the Goddess was pre-eminent in religion, women were pre-eminent in society. Z. Budapest, for example, evokes the interdependence of religion and society in the subtitle: ‘[w]immin’s religion, as in heaven, so on earth’. This observation is a powerful idea and is a fundamental premise in Goddess literature; it is not, however, one that Goddess writers originated – it can, in fact, be traced to nineteenth-century assumptions about the relationship between religion and society. Like the Goddess, women are characterised by having life-generating powers, which supposedly led to them being revered in all aspects of life, as Diane Stein explains in the following excerpt:

Women as birthgivers and nurturers were the images and embodiments of the Goddess and creators of life on earth. They were the creators of individual life as the Goddess was the creator of the universal, of all species and life as a whole. With this idea implicit in society, women were in the position of initiators and leaders of culture and politics, the creators of their families and tribes as earthly representatives of universal form. Women were therefore people of consequence in the early tribe or state – they were mirrors of divinity. What they did had meaning and political/personal influence and power.

Stein’s extraordinary description of women as powerful and influential, as leaders, creators of life and ‘mirrors of divinity’, evokes a utopia for women. While Eisler

82 Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ p. 122. Stone adds that ‘[t]he worship of the Goddess as valiant warrior seems to have been responsible for the numerous reports of female soldiers, later referred to by the classical Greeks as the Amazons. More thoroughly examining the accounts of the esteem the Amazons paid to the female deity, it became evident that women who worshiped a warrior Goddess hunted and fought in the lands of Libya, Anatolia, Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia, and Russia and were far from the mythical fantasy so many writers of today would have us believe.’

83 Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries: Part One, Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, Los Angeles, 1979, p. 10. She adds: ‘[w]hat people believe (faith – religion) is political because it influences their actions and because it is the vehicle by which a religion perpetuates a social system.’

84 In the 1860s, for example, the image of a single Goddess was combined with J.J. Bachofen’s theory ‘that society was originally woman-centred.’ Hutton, ‘The Discovery of the Modern Goddess,’ p. 93.

85 Stein, Casting the Circle, p. 2.
claims that prehistoric communities were not ideal or utopian societies, she still maintains that they were far better than those of the succeeding period and of today. According to Marija Gimbutas, the early societies were 'matrifocal and probably matrilinear, agricultural and sedentary, egalitarian and peaceful.' Other oft-cited characteristics of Goddess worshipping, women-centred societies include an emphasis on the creation and nurturing of life, an attitude of open sexuality, interest in the arts, and nature-worshipping. The writers imagine a society that was the complete opposite of the patriarchal societies that were to follow.

The Goddess writers draw from archaeology, art and mythology to describe the religion and extrapolate from these representations to illustrate the reality of the "Golden Age" society and women's place in it. It is crucial, for their feminist agenda, not only to describe the religion, but also to have an understanding of real women's lives. The following will elucidate the Goddess writers' representation of the "Golden Age" society by outlining the predominant themes in the mythistory, all of which have positive implications for women and include descriptions of Goddess societies as peaceful and egalitarian (despite academic views to the contrary about the Neolithic period): developments in agriculture, flourishing material arts, an advanced built environment, and open attitudes to sexuality.

**Peaceful societies: contrary views of the Neolithic**

Goddess writers represent "Golden Age" societies as being peaceful. In doing so, their construction conflicts with conventional views of the Neolithic. According to Goddess writers, the technological developments of the Neolithic are employed in peaceful, cultured and civilised ways. Thus, their gendered ideology links aggression and violence with men, rather than with women.

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87 Gimbutas in Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, p. 168. James Mellaart found a culture in Anatolia (like that found by Gimbutas in Old Europe), 'where women and Goddesses were prominent, a culture that he believed to have been matrilineal and matrilocal and peaceful, and in which the Goddess was the most powerful religious image'. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, p. 169. This is a completely different interpretation of Mellaart from one mentioned later in this section by Townsend. Critics and Goddess writers interpret Mellaart differently to suit their particular aims.
88 This last feature will be assessed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.
In the Goddess optic, in a society that understood women to be the source of life, violence was inconceivable and peace was inherent. Stein suggests, for instance, that ‘[i]n cultures where the goddess as planet was revered, where all life was seen as having a shared source and as a gift of the female, the taking of human or animal life was beyond thought.’ Once again, Stein evokes a utopian society. Other Goddess writers support her contention. Gadon, for example, links Goddess culture with peace in the following excerpt:

perhaps the most provocative discovery of recent archaeological research is that nowhere in Neolithic Goddess cultures is there any sign of warfare. There is no evidence of fortifications, of violent death, invasion, or conquest. We can only conclude that there was some direct relation between Goddess religion and peaceful coexistence. Neolithic Goddess culture was woman-centered, peaceful, prosperous, and nonhierarchical.

Likewise, Starhawk affirms the peacefulness of Goddess societies. She considers particular archaeological sites and maintains that the archaeological record shows a lack of violence. Consequently, she links violence with patriarchal societies. Similarly, Riane Eisler emphasises the peacefulness of early civilisations. From analysing archaeology and art she concludes that ‘[t]here is in the archeological record a general absence of fortifications and signs of destruction through armed conquest. In contrast to the motifs we are all so familiar with, there is also a general absence in the art of these societies of images of men killing each other in battle or raping women.'

91 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 24. There appears to be no awareness here of archaeological evidence that suggests acts of violence in Neolithic society. There is, in fact, disagreement among scholars of the Neolithic period as to how peaceful Neolithic societies were. L.H. Keeley, for instance, points out that in the context of closely-spaced villages inter-family feuds and other conflicts would have occurred due to disagreements over intermarriage, land exploitation, water use and animal grazing. L.H. Keeley, War before Civilization, Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford, 1996, pp. 122-123, paraphrased in Catherine Perlès, The Early Neolithic in Greece: The First Farming Communities in Europe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 293. In contrast, Perlès argues that Early Neolithic societies were peaceful. Perlès, The Early Neolithic in Greece, pp. 293–294.
92 Starhawk, for example, asserts that '[t]he many Paleolithic sites associated with Goddess figures – Laussel, Angles-Sur-Anglin, Cogul, La Magdaleine, Malta, to name just a few – show no evidence of human sacrifice. In the Neolithic, Çatal Hüyük is one of the earliest (circa 6500-5700 BC) and most clearly matriarchal sites excavated. The many shrines decorated with figures of the Mother Goddess and her son-paramour have no provisions for either human or animal sacrifice: no altars, no pits for blood, and no caches of bones. Nor do the Goddess temples of Malta and Sardinia, the passage graves and stone circles of the megalith builders, or the excavated sites of Crete show any evidence that human beings were ever ritually murdered. Where human sacrifice is clearly evident – for example, in the Royal Tombs of the Sumerian city Ur, where entire courts followed the king into death – it is associated with cultures that have already made the shift to patriarchy.' Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 31.
93 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 31.
94 Eisler believes that the Neolithic was peaceful. She declares: ‘[o]nce again, the archaeological findings... not only demolish the old “truism” of the “warlike Neolithic” but also illuminate our true past’. Riane Eisler, ‘Our Lost Heritage: New Facts on How God Became a Man,’ The Humanist, vol. 45, 1985, p. 27.
Goddess writers emphasise that Neolithic peoples, in reflecting the peacefulness displayed in their Goddess religion, used their new technologies in peaceful and creative ways. Gadon, for example, stresses that ‘Neolithic peoples had long known how to work metals like copper and gold but used them for ornamental and religious purposes.’\textsuperscript{96} Gadon implies that just because metals had been discovered it does not mean that they were used for violent purposes. Likewise, Gimbutas describes a peaceful, creative culture. She contends that

\begin{quote}
[t]his culture [Old Europe] took keen delight in the natural wonders of this world. Its people did not produce lethal weapons or build forts in inaccessible places, as their successors did, even when they were acquainted with metallurgy. Instead, they built magnificent tomb-shrines and temples, comfortable houses in moderately-sized villages, and created superb pottery and sculptures. This was a long-lasting period of remarkable creativity and stability, an age free of strife. Their culture was a culture of art.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

In this description of an artistic and creative society there is a suggestion that this society was cultured and civilised. This atmosphere of relative wealth, peace, new technologies, and a high standard of living\textsuperscript{98} was, so it is argued, conducive to the material arts flourishing.\textsuperscript{99} A society at peace gave time for creative pursuits, rather than for destructive endeavours. Not only did the arts flourish, but the techniques, designs and aesthetics of Goddess cultures such as Minoan Crete stand out in the history of art. Eisler, for instance, declares that ‘its art is so natural, so free, so full of the celebration of life in all its forms that scholars have described it as unique in the annals of civilization.’\textsuperscript{100}

The built environment is also presented in the Goddess mythistory as being particularly advanced, again highlighting the fact that it is not a primitive culture. Riane Eisler describes Minoan Crete as having ‘the first paved roads in Europe, [and] even indoor plumbing’\textsuperscript{101} and, unlike the later societies of antiquity, ‘[i]ts houses were built for both beauty and comfort.’\textsuperscript{102} The houses of Çatal Hüyük are described as being ‘kept immaculately clean; refuse and sewage were disposed of in small courtyards.’\textsuperscript{103} The emphasis here is on wealth, a high standard of living, and cleanliness, all of which are

\begin{footnotes}
96 Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 111.
99 Gadon, for instance, explains that pottery became an art with the invention of the kiln. Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 22.
\end{footnotes}
modern middle-class values. These are the values that would appeal to the predominantly white middle-class audience of Goddess literature.

Any suggestion of conflict is omitted from the Goddess writers' construction. Again, the Neolithic is not presented as in any way in opposition to the preceding period, the Upper Palaeolithic, but in opposition to the warmongering patriarchal period that was to follow. A gendered link between women and peace is assumed in the Goddess literature in the way that the new technology of metal production results in art in a woman-centred society, while the expectation is that the same technology results in weapons and warfare in a patriarchal society. I would argue that the emphasis on peace in the Goddess writers' construction of the “Golden Age” reflects the anti-war movement ideals of the late 1960s / early 1970s, which were also particularly strong in the feminist movement.104

In stark contrast to Goddess writers' perceptions, the academic view of the Neolithic period is of a technological revolution often associated with violence.105 Joan Townsend draws on James Mellaart's research at Çatal Hüyük to dismiss the Goddess writers' narrative of a peaceful Neolithic period. According to Townsend, 'Mellaart noted that the solid Pueblo-style houses with entry only by ladder from the roof were excellent for defense'.106 Furthermore, Townsend mentions that there is evidence of violence at Çatal Hüyük.107 For example, she remarks that '[m]ace heads and other weapons were found with some male burials, and head wounds were common on skulls.'108 Townsend claims that archaeological evidence 'now indicates that peace was a function of isolation, and hostilities began as soon as the fertile northern and central European lands began to fill up. Some Neolithic communities seem to have had defensive walls; other settlements used a labyrinthine plan, presumably to make enemy penetration more difficult.'109 Likewise, Rosemary Radford Ruether disagrees with Goddess writers'
positive interpretations of James Mellaart’s findings and maintains that his evidence indicates that Çatal Hiiyiık was not pacific.¹¹⁰

Most Goddess writers ignore this version of prehistory or, like Riane Eisler, acknowledge the textbook understanding of the Neolithic revolution and refute it. According to Eisler, ‘[c]ontrary to what we have been taught of the Neolithic or first agrarian civilizations as male dominated and highly violent, these were generally peaceful societies in which both women and men lived in harmony with one another and nature.’¹¹¹ Elsewhere Eisler addresses the same issue and infers that Neolithic societies ‘were generally peaceful societies that traded extensively with their neighbours rather than killing or plundering to acquire wealth.’¹¹² She adds that ‘[t]hanks to far more scientific and extensive archeological excavations, we also know that in these highly creative societies women held important social positions as priestesses, craftspeople, and elders of matrilineal clans.’¹¹³

Likewise, Carol Christ critiques the textbook view of the Palaeolithic as violent and claims that scholars portraying this perspective are misinformed. Christ paints a picture of the conventional view of the Palaeolithic as being ‘dominated by male hunters who went out and clubbed wild beasts, then came home to their caves and clubbed their wives and children.’¹¹⁴ Christ credits feminist scholars with re-writing this negative view of a sexist, violent culture.¹¹⁵ The dominant, savage, male hunters and cartoon “caveman” images predominant in textbook history are replaced by a picture of egalitarian, peaceful societies in which men and women played different roles (hunter and gatherer respectively), but were respected for their contributions, ‘men being valued for hunting and women for giving birth and gathering.’¹¹⁶ Christ credits “women the gatherers” with contributing eighty per cent of the food.¹¹⁷ Regardless of her accuracy, Christ’s version is crucial for challenging the image of Palaeolithic society as being primitive in behaviour and social arrangement.

¹¹⁰ Ruether, Gaia and God, pp. 152–154.
¹¹⁴ Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 52.
¹¹⁵ Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 52.
¹¹⁶ Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 168.
Egalitarianism

The second feature in the representation of the “Golden Age”, and closely linked to the above description of peacefulness, is that societies are presented as being egalitarian. By “egalitarian” Goddess writers mean non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, partnership societies.\(^{118}\) Marija Gimbutas, for instance, found no evidence to suggest that Old Europe was patrilinear or patriarchal.\(^{119}\) She claimed that ‘[e]vidence from the cemeteries does not indicate a subordinate position of women.’\(^{120}\) Similarly, Carol Christ states that while we cannot know ‘the religious and social roles in the Paleolithic times’ for sure, ‘there is no reason to assume that women were subordinate.’\(^{121}\) While writers claim that women were not dominated by men, they are careful not to suggest the opposite, so as not to create an image of women dominating men.\(^{122}\) The fact that women held important public positions and were heads of clans did not mean that they subordinated men. In other words, the argument is put forward that just because a society is not patriarchal does not mean that the only other option is a reversal of the power relations, that is, a matriarchy.\(^{123}\) Riane Eisler believes that the Goddess cultures were what she terms a partnership society in which ‘diversity [was] not equated with inferiority or superiority.’\(^{124}\) Likewise, referring to Old Europe, Gimbutas only found evidence that suggested societies were egalitarian.\(^{125}\) Carol Christ claims that in small-scale Palaeolithic societies ‘everyone’s voice could be heard, and the kinds of status differentiation and hierarchy that develop in large-scale societies were not possible.’\(^{126}\) Women and men were valued for their different roles and, according to Christ, they ‘were probably roughly equal in Paleolithic society’.\(^{127}\)


\(^{119}\) Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 64.

\(^{120}\) Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 64.


\(^{122}\) For example, with regards to Minoan Crete, Carol Christ highlights that there is no evidence to suggest that women dominated men. Carol P. Christ, *Odyssey with the Goddess: A Spiritual Quest in Crete*, Continuum, New York, 1995, p. 78.

\(^{123}\) See Appendix A for further discussion of the “matriarchy” debate.


\(^{125}\) Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 64. Anne Barstow’s description of the built environment at Çatal Hüyük suggests an egalitarian society. She explains, for example, that ‘the homes were one-story abodes entered from the roof by a ladder and showed very little variation in wealth or possessions.’ Barstow, ‘The Prehistoric Goddess,’ p. 10.


This emphasis on the egalitarianism of Goddess societies is unsurprising, but is also open to questioning. Given that in Goddess literature women are frequently described as having the most important positions in Goddess cultures, it is difficult to see how women and men enjoyed equality. There are also some other descriptions that conflict with the image of egalitarianism. Gimbutas, for example, mentions the unstratified nature of Old Europe, but simultaneously describes a ‘rich middle class that arose as a consequence of metallurgy and expansion of trade.’ She goes on to explain that the high quality goods belonged ‘to the Goddess and to Her representative, the queen-priestess’ and ‘not to the chief, as is customary in chiefdoms.’ The situation of the “queen-priestess” receiving special goods would seem to be similar to a chief receiving special treatment in other cultures. Both arrangements appear to be hierarchical.

Inventing technologies

The third feature of the Goddess mythistory concerns the introduction of agriculture and closely related developments such as weaving and pottery. As women were regarded as the creators of life, they are depicted as the inventors of farming practices and many other technologies that form the background to most Goddess writing about the period of Goddess cultures. Women are often credited with discovering agriculture because it is perceived that they were the ‘holders of the mystery of life’ and, as gatherers in the Palaeolithic period, had an awareness of the relationship between seeds and plants. The development of agriculture led to an array of new skills and technologies that women are attributed with introducing. Stein, for example, claims that ‘[e]arly women are recognized as the originators and dis-coverers [sic] of weaving, sewing, cooking, basketry and pottery as well as planting and the domestication of animals.’ In addition, women are perceived to have had access to the “mysteries” associated with pottery and weaving through knowledge conveyed from the Goddess. The transformation involved in pottery was presumably mysterious to prehistoric people and

130 The developments in agriculture will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Five when the implications for the earth and nature will be the focus.
133 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 53.
135 With reference to women, Stein explains that ‘[b]eings seen as holders of the mystery of life, as images of the goddess, are likely to be active in exploring their world and expected to use choice and initiative.’ Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 5.
thus may have been attributed to the deity or to women because they were thought to have knowledge of the “mysteries” of life because of their ability to create life. Christ suggests that women can be credited with the creation of spinning and weaving because of the fact that these “are part of woman’s traditional roles in nearly all agricultural societies.” The same can be said for the introduction of pottery, although Christ adds that this cannot be said for all traditional cultures. Regarding pottery, Christ reflects that “[w]omen probably invented pottery because the earliest pots were made to aid women’s work of food storage and preparation.” It is argued that as women were involved in each stage of agricultural production they developed the technologies necessary for its smooth and successful production. As not all of these technologies were necessarily self-evident, the implications are that women would have been revered for their inventiveness and, thus, would have enjoyed a high status.

While women are credited with these important developments in Goddess literature, they are, in fact, perceived to act as intermediaries for the Goddess— for it was she who was the real holder of the “mysteries”. Gadon, for example, points out that “weaving and pottery were gifts of the Goddess.” Similarly, Christ adds that “[a]ll of the new discoveries of the Neolithic era were probably understood to be “mysteries” whose secrets were revealed by the Goddess.” The Goddess has the knowledge of the mystery of life and of the transformative processes involved in crafts such as pottery. Women also have access to such mysteries because of their inherent connections to the Goddess. Women, as a result, made offerings to the Goddesses who were believed to be custodians of knowledge necessary for the development of particular skills and innovations. ‘Cakes baked by priestesses’, for example, ‘were offered to the Goddess in gratitude for the harvest.”

Goddess writers believe that the numerous developments in agriculture, weaving and pottery occurred in Goddess cultures and formed the basis of civilisation. The agricultural-related developments of, for instance, food storage, led to an increase in

136 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 54.
137 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 54.
138 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 54.
139 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 53.
140 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 22.
141 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 54.
142 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 22.
143 See, for example, Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 10.
population, trade and contact with other cultures.\textsuperscript{144} The implication is that such contact occurred in a civilised, non-violent manner. Again the textbook and scholarly version of the Neolithic as violent is being refuted. The Goddess writers’ unconventional counter-argument against academic views of the Neolithic is essential to their mythistory of the “Golden Age” as a time in which women were empowered and society was flourishing in all spheres, due to women’s discoveries, leadership and the social behaviour and arrangement imbued by a woman-centred society.

Open sexuality

Another feature of Goddess writers’ historical imaginary that differentiates the Goddess cultures from the succeeding patriarchal societies concerns attitudes towards sexuality. Again, the Goddess’s attributes are mirrored in women’s reality and implicitly reflect the values of second-wave feminism. The Goddess cultures are presented as celebrating sexuality and the human body.\textsuperscript{145} Elinor Gadon, for instance, finds this attitude in the flourishing Goddess culture of Minoan Crete.\textsuperscript{146} Rachel Pollack compares the attitudes of the Minoans with those of the Ancient Greeks to highlight their different perspectives. For instance, according to Pollack, ‘[i]ike the later Greeks, the Cretans honoured the body and its beauty. Unlike the Greeks, who sought balanced perfection, the Cretans expressed the body’s vitality. We see this in the figurines of the Goddess Herself, bare breasted, filled with energy, holding snakes in each hand.’\textsuperscript{147} The Minoan frescoes in the Palace of Knossos are treated as a rich source of information regarding sex roles. Rachel Pollack suggests that the frescoes mirrored activities in Minoan Crete and, thus, attitudes to gender and sexuality can be inferred from the frescoes. Pollack’s description of the “Fresco of the Bull-leapers” emphasises gender equality and fluidity. She explains that

\begin{quote}
[i]n this fresco, the women and men appear almost identical, their bodies graceful and fluid, very different from the stiff matador of later centuries, who does not see the bull as a source of life, but as a means to test his own mastery of nature, through conquest and slaughter.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 22.
\item Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 87. Gadon describes the celebration of sexuality and the body in Minoan art. I acknowledge that there are different points of view regarding sexuality. Goddess writers embrace a particular feminist approach to sexuality – one of open sexuality, and celebration of sexual difference and the body. It is based on essentialist feminism from the 1980s and earlier.
\item Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 87.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Interestingly, the pictures show the women bull dancers wearing codpieces to give the groin the image of male genitals. By contrast, pictures of men in religious ceremonies show them dressed in flounced skirts.\footnote{Pollack, \textit{The Body of the Goddess}, pp. 110–111.} Here biology is not seen to limit men’s or women’s roles or identities. This fascinating idea does, however, conflict with the imaginary commonly presented in Goddess literature, which is essentialist, of Minoan Crete being Goddess- and women-centred.\footnote{See, for example, Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 87; Pollack, \textit{The Body of the Goddess}, p. 139; Eisler, ‘The Goddess of Nature and Spirituality,’ p. 15.} If gender fluidity extended to religion and society, would that result in men and women interchanging their jobs, skills, and responsibilities? Similarly, would Goddesses and gods interchange their roles? This image also contrasts with Carol Christ’s emphasis on men and women having different roles, determined by their sex.\footnote{In this case, Rachel Pollack’s focus on gender fluidity may reveal more about her transexuality (she was formerly Richard Pollack) than it does of Goddess writers’ more general perspectives on sexuality in Minoan Crete.}

The notion of gender fluidity is an uncommon one in Goddess literature. What does appear in regard to sexuality, however, is women’s freedom to have sexual relations with men of their choice and, also, women’s knowledge, albeit through the Goddess, of the reproductive process. Women, it is suggested, could have as many husbands as they wished and the concept of adultery was non-existent.\footnote{Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 64.} Again, this highlights the difference between patriarchal societies, which controlled women’s sexuality, and Goddess cultures. As women were non-monogamous the concept of fatherhood did not exist\footnote{Stein, \textit{The Women’s Spirituality Book}, p. 5.} and lineage, therefore, was traced through the mother’s line. Considering the Etruscans and prehistoric Athenians, Marija Gimbutas maintains that children were unaware of their fathers and that their lineage was through the mother’s side.\footnote{Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 64.} Stewart and Janet Farrar explain that ‘[i]n earliest times, the biological nature of paternity was not recognized; women were believed to be impregnated by the Moon’s rays or by other means according to various local theories.’\footnote{Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, ‘Men and Women in Witchcraft,’ in Chas Clifton (ed.), \textit{Witchcraft Today, Book One: The Modern Craft Movement}, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1996, p. 114.} Diane Stein suggests that when women did come to understand the male role in reproduction, they ‘held it secret from men.’\footnote{Stein, \textit{The Women’s Spirituality Book}, p. 5.} When reproduction was eventually understood by men and women, they could only be certain of maternity.\footnote{Farrar and Farrar, ‘Men and Women in Witchcraft,’ p. 114.} As a result, descent, lineage and property would have been
determined through the maternal line. There is an interesting absence of detailed discussion of lesbianism in the Goddess literature of the "Golden Age" – in these utopias women, it is implied, are heterosexual. 

In the Goddess mythistory of the "Golden Age" women's social realities mirror the exemplary model provided by their deity. The main features of the Goddess writers' representation depict a cultured, advanced, peaceful society in which women are active in all spheres. The mythistory challenges conventional archaeology and history, particularly with regard to the Goddess writers' portrayal of the Neolithic revolution, as well as conflicting with feminist history that understands history to have always been patriarchal. Moreover, the inventions and innovations that occurred throughout the "Golden Age" period suggest that there is a sense of evolutionary progress in the Goddess cultures.

Conclusion

Goddess writers' historical imaginary of the "Golden Age" of prehistoric Goddess cultures generally overflows with positive descriptions of societies in which women were empowered in religion and society. The Goddess writers' attention to time periods, dates and geography serves to emphasise the antiquity of the Goddess, proves her prehistoric roots, and offers her followers authority and validation. The focus on European locations can, on the one hand, be considered to be a Eurocentric approach; on the other hand, it can be interpreted as evidence that the Goddess writers do not appropriate cultures other than their own. The primary reason for the focus on Europe, however, can be attributed to the influence of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas about Goddess worship in Europe. The descriptions of the pre-patriarchal religion are overwhelmingly of worship of a single Goddess; her various images and names are.

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157 There are, however, some exceptions. Z. Budapest, for instance, describes the Dianics as being either celibate or lesbian. This does not mean, however, that all pre-patriarchal Goddess worshippers were celibate or lesbian. In Z. Budapest's mythistory of the "Golden Age" the Dianics worshipped the Goddess Diana. Other groups in Goddess societies, however, worshipped Goddesses along with their men and had heterosexual relations with men. Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, The Holy Book of Women Mysteries: Part Two, Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 25-27. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor claim that in pre-patriarchal Celtic societies homosexuality was common. They also discuss marriage and contend that women chose their husbands and maintained their independence. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother of All, Rainbow, Trondheim 1981, p. 58. Their discussion about homosexuality tends to be about male homosexuality in patriarchal societies as being considered ideal homosexuality in Classical Greek society. They claim that natural sexuality was bisexuality and that '[t]he further back one goes in time the more bisexual is the Great Mother.' Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 16.
across cultures, that is, are conflated into one. A single Goddess worshipped across
time and place is important to the Goddess mythistory because it shows that the
Goddess was revered far and wide, rather than in isolated pockets, thus elevating her
further.

Just as the Goddess is revered and believed to be the holder of the "mysteries" behind
creation, reproduction, developments and inventions, women are presented as mirroring
their deity and being responsible for the invention of agriculture and related
technological and artistic advances, all of which are presented as creating the
preconditions for a harmonious, productive, and cultured society. Advances in
technologies, for example, are described as being used to make the built environment
and the arts of Neolithic societies more aesthetically beautiful, not for fortifications or
weaponry (which are clearly perceived to be a patriarchal "male" domain). This view
challenges the conventional understanding in archaeology, anthropology and history of
the Neolithic period. As the Neolithic period is included in the Goddess writers’
definition of the "Golden Age" it is, therefore, essential for the mythistory of this period
that the Neolithic be peaceful, egalitarian and empowering for women in all spheres of
life. The Goddess mythistory requires a smooth transition from the Palaeolithic to the
Neolithic.

The fact that the Goddess cultures were sophisticated in the areas of agriculture,
engineering, architecture, and the arts and crafts could appear, at first glance, to
challenge the idea that history is a narrative of linear progression and propose a notion
of history as cyclical. After all, these early societies are not presented as primitive,
backward, or as the first stages in the evolution of human existence. Rather, this period
is presented as a stage from which the succeeding cultures declined. The "Golden Age"
period, however, is identified as being a far longer period than the succeeding
patriarchal one, which suggests that the latter is insignificant in the big picture of the
overall mythistory. Furthermore, within the period of the "Golden Age" there is a sense
of linear progress with regards to the development of agricultural skills and other
inventions. I would argue, therefore, that Goddess writers construct a linear grand
narrative, albeit one interrupted briefly by patriarchy.

Goddess writers seek evidence for their construction from history, archaeology, and
anthropology to legitimate their claims. They have contributed to the second-wave
feminist agenda by rewriting women into prehistory, archaeology, history and religion. They form a part of the western religious feminist project of challenging androcentric religious history. Finding the biblical traditions unacceptably sexist and unreformable, Goddess worshippers occupy the revolutionary end of the religious spectrum.\(^{158}\) Furthermore, they challenge the feminist histories that present the patriarchy as having always been present.

The majority of Goddess writers rely heavily on Gimbutas’s interpretation of her vast catalogues of figurines and artefacts from excavations throughout Old Europe. Elinor Gadon claims that Gimbutas’s work is crucial in ‘recovering the religion and culture of Old Europe.’\(^{159}\) Numerous Goddess writers, including Merlin Stone, Starhawk, Riane Eisler, Carol Christ, Diane Stein, Gloria Orenstein, Elinor Gadon, Rachel Pollack, support their mythstories with archaeological evidence. As McCance points out, these Goddess writers’ ‘quest for the Goddess’ is ‘an archaeological search for origins’.\(^{160}\) In almost all cases, the writers are not doing their own archaeological or historical research, but rely on the work of others.\(^{161}\) While most Goddess writers rely on Gimbutas, Merlin Stone, and Carol Christ, as well as on each other, they do cite, from time to time, figures such as J.J. Bachofen, Sir Arthur Evans, Jane Ellen Harrison, Sir James Frazer, Erich Neumann, and Robert Graves, which, again, highlights the importance of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories in archaeology, anthropology and mythography for the Goddess mythistory. Diane Purkiss’s claim that the feminist revival actually comes from the work of men in the twentieth century, and not, as is claimed, from the rediscovery of prehistoric women\(^{162}\) illustrates that the concept of a great Goddess is not a new idea. I would argue, however, that while the influence of nineteenth- and twentieth-century males is undeniable, firstly, Purkiss excludes the influence of women such as Jane Ellen Harrison and Jacquetta Hawkes from her

\(^{158}\) While what McCance labels ‘radical or post-biblical feminists’ find Biblical traditions sexist and unreformable, at the other end of the spectrum are religious feminists who do not find the Bible sexist. Dawne McCance, ‘Understandings of “the Goddess” in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship,’ in Larry Hurtado (ed.), *Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate, University of Manitoba Studies in Religion, No 1*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1990, p. 166.

\(^{159}\) Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 40. Gadon believes that Gimbutas was the first to ‘have analysed European iconography of the Neolithic and Copper Age systematically in order to reconstruct the underlying belief system.’

\(^{160}\) McCance, ‘Understandings of “the Goddess”,’ p. 169.


\(^{162}\) Purkiss, ‘Women’s Rewriting of Myth,’ p. 442. Purkiss emphasises that the Goddess is important to male poets; ‘she prevents the dreaded onset of sentimental homosexuality.’ Purkiss, ‘Women’s Rewriting of Myth,’ p. 443. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Wood, Ruether and Rigby also discuss the importance of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century male writers.
discussion. Secondly, the late twentieth-century adoption of the idea by Goddess writers differs from its predecessors. As Purkiss herself points out, Graves viewed the Goddess as a “muse” and thus as an object.\textsuperscript{163} This was not a feminist approach. Contemporary Goddess worshippers, in contrast, view the Goddess as a subject and creator and, by extension, consider women to be subjects.

The mythistory of the “Golden Age” is significant for its proponents. By challenging and re-writing history, archaeology, and religion, Goddess writers have provided women with “the origins, narratives, history, identity, and language which they have been lacking”.\textsuperscript{164} This positive historical imaginary is an inspiration to women in spiritual and secular realms. The Goddess writers’ mythistory provides women with origins and a past from which they can reassess their present and future.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{163} Purkiss, ‘Women’s Rewriting of Myth,’ p. 443.
\textsuperscript{164} McCance, ‘Understandings of “the Goddess”,’ p. 174.
Chapter Three: The “Fall” period: the patriarchal conquest of Goddess cultures

History ... has been a series of invasions against the female. Once the leaders of civilization, women became breeders and housekeepers without autonomy or voice, isolated from each other and from the workings of society. Some patriarchal countries and religions even denied that women had souls. Women worldwide were kept uneducated and dominated while their thousands of years of culture were taken over by male establishments or lost altogether. Female learning and herstory were systematically destroyed, as evidenced in the burning of the libraries at Alexandria and other places, and in the burnings later of women themselves, nine million or more in Europe from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Once women were decimated, the slave trade, colonial and missionary movements continued the process of destruction in the remaining Goddess cultures. The takeover was universal, but somehow women have survived, along with women’s peaceful, life-oriented values, and the women’s divinity, the Goddess.

Goddess women were the healers, counsellors, midwives, and scientists. They have continued in these roles despite the oppressions of the patriarchal order. The wiccan religion went underground, becoming highly secret, with groups and members separated from each other, but it continued and survived.


Introduction

Diane Stein’s sweeping summary outlines the patriarchal conquests of peaceful Goddess-worshipping societies and the invaders’ unremitting attempts, throughout millennia, to obliterate women’s knowledge, autonomy, independence, worth, and religion. Despite the attackers’ intentions, women were, supposedly, resilient and continued to practise their religion, knowledges and skills in hiding. Following the “Golden Age”, Goddess writers, as illustrated by Stein, present a tragic period of history under the patriarchy, which shall be referred to as the “Fall”.¹ Their mythistory contends that Goddess cultures were eventually replaced by societies and a religion that were the antithesis of the preceding Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic cultures in every way. The immanent Goddess, creator of all, was undermined by sky gods and eventually, in monotheistic religions, removed altogether. Changes in religion were mirrored in society. Women, for example, became the property of their husbands, had their ideas stifled, talents and skills overlooked, and their sexuality controlled. In

¹ By the “Fall”, I am referring to the period that Goddess writers describe as tragic for the Goddess, women and nature. Goddess writers do not necessarily employ the term the “Fall”.

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addition, women's interest in the creation of artworks was sidelined by the masculine
deavour of weapons production.

This representation by the Goddess writers of the “Fall” period is discussed by various
scholars. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, criticises the Goddess writers’ view
that the decline into patriarchal culture from a Goddess paradise occurred because of
external forces. Ruether contends that the seizure of power occurred due to a complex
combination of events. Ruether challenges the Goddess writers’ narrative that women
had no responsibility for the change from a Goddess culture to a patriarchal society.
Most scholarly critiques of the “Fall” period focus particularly on the Goddess
mythistory of the early modern European witch persecutions. A major tendency in the
secondary critical literature is to attack the Goddess mythistory for historical
inaccuracies and poor methodology: for simplifying and generalising a complex
history. In contrast, there are assertions, such as Janice Crosby’s, that the Goddess
perspective is a much-needed re-writing of the history of the early modern witch-hunts.
Similarly, Kathryn Rountree sees the Goddess movement’s reclamation of the “witch”

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2 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*,

3 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, p. 8. She declares that '[i]t is dangerous for the story of the prepatriarchal paradise
and the fall into patriarchy is that it too easily allows somewhat marginalized Euro-American women and
men to identify themselves with a lost innocence and to fail to take responsibility for their own complicity
in the evils they excoriate.'

4 There are, however, no major critical studies on the Goddess writers' representation of the “Fall” period
in its entirety.

5 Joan Townsend, for instance, is critical of the ‘sweeping generalisations’ of such interpretations of the
in Larry Hurtado (ed.), *Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia,
1990, p. 195. With regard to the witch persecutions, Diane Purkiss, for instance, declares that despite
evidence to the contrary, Goddess writers persist with their particular account because it is more
significant to them. Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century
were not the same all over Europe and that the focus was not primarily on midwives, healers or sexually
liberated women. She remarks: '[a]s this has been known for some time. Yet in the teeth of the
evidence, some women continue to find this story believable, continue to circulate it. Some women are
still so attached to the story that they resist efforts to disprove it.' See Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, p.
11, for further criticism of radical feminist history.

6 Crosby claims that '[i]t is known for some time. Yet in the teeth of the evidence, some women continue to find this story believable, continue to circulate it. Some women are still so attached to the story that they resist efforts to disprove it.' See Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, p.
11, for further criticism of radical feminist history.

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as an impetus to re-evaluate 'historical “witches”' and as a challenge to 'historians' conventional interpretations of the witch-craze'. More illuminating for my approach, however, are the discussions that neither support nor dismiss the Goddess writers' representation, but consider the meaning of the “Fall” mythistory, highlight particular themes, and comment on the Goddess writers’ influences. Helen Berger, for instance, acknowledges the Goddess writers' concern with numbers killed during the witch persecutions, and highlights the practice of referring to the period as a “holocaust” and as the “burning times”. Furthermore, Berger suggests that the early modern witch-hunts provide contemporary witches with something to identify with – that is, ‘a period of martyrdom’.

Several scholars comment on the theme of survival during this “Fall” period. Juliette Wood points out that the notion of survival works to ‘provide a link between the past and future.’ Wood also comments on where this survival occurs, that is, on the periphery of patriarchal culture, as well as how such a notion is important for the possibility of revitalisation. Graham Harvey briefly describes the “Fall” period as the ‘arrival of the patriarchy’. Harvey also reflects on the importance of the existence of classical cults within the patriarchy. The suggestion is that if the Goddess was celebrated in a patriarchal world in the past, then the same can happen in the present.

With regards to considering the influences on the Goddess mythistory, Margaret Murray

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7 Kathryn Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West: Feminists Reclaim the Crone,’ *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 30, 1997, p. 225. All witchcraft historians, whether they are conventional, as Rountree describes them, or feminist, acknowledge that women were persecuted for witchcraft; historians differ, however, in regard to the extent to which they suggest women were the targets and the cause of the persecutions. The history of the early modern European witch persecutions has not been ignored or erased. I would suggest that both Crosby and Rountree have a limited understanding of early modern European historiography of the witch persecutions as neither of them engage with the wealth of specialist historians' studies to gain an understanding of the period.


11 Harvey’s most interesting comment is that he does not know how the invading patriarchal hordes became patriarchal in the first place. Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 1997, p. 73. He remarks: ‘I can find no sustained discussion about how these hordes themselves became patriarchal; it seems to be accepted that this does not need explanation.’

12 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, p. 84.
is widely recognised as an important figure. Diane Purkiss also points out the influence of the concerns of second-wave feminism on Goddess writers.¹³

In this chapter, I will explore these academic critiques further. For instance, with regards to the notion of survival, I will show that the idea is far more complex than the Goddess surviving either in pockets (Berger), on the periphery (Wood), or within the patriarchy (Harvey). The survival in Goddess literature is an intricate combination, I argue, of all three perspectives. With regards to accusations of the Goddess mythistory being simplistic or relying on generalisations, I will explore the purpose such an approach serves and illustrate that, while on the surface the mythistory may seem oversimplified, Goddess writers' representations at times do differ and are insightful and specific. I also find the use and exclusion of sources – the transference of knowledge within and outside of academia – a particularly fascinating area and will consider how Margaret Murray and Carlo Ginzburg, for instance, have been employed by Goddess writers, while other accounts have not been used. Throughout this chapter, however, as the above topics are addressed, the underlying concern is to consider how such a mythistory empowers a particular feminist programme.

The period designated as the “Fall” in the mythistory is, in fact, a series of “Falls”.¹⁴ That is, the attacks against women, while ceaseless, were worse during particular events or epochs, which combine to form the period under enquiry. The “Falls” take place in various locations throughout Europe. The geographical spread shifts from a focus on the Near East and the Mediterranean in the “Golden Age” (see Chapter Two) and early “Fall” period to Europe more generally, particularly during the later “Fall” period of the witch persecutions. Goddess writers do not suggest that the patriarchal conquest occurred all over Europe simultaneously; some areas continued to develop, while others were falling to the invaders.¹⁵ For example, as Marija Gimbutas points out,

> [t]he Aegean and Mediterranean regions and western Europe escaped the process the longest; there, especially in the islands such as Thera, Crete, Malta, and Sardinia, Old European culture flourished in an enviably peaceful and creative civilization until 1500 BC, a thousand to 1500 years after central Europe had been thoroughly transformed.¹⁶

¹³ For instance, the Goddess writers’ imaginary of the early modern witch as healer/wisewoman reflects contemporary feminist concerns with reproductive rights. Purkiss, _The Witch in History_, pp. 19–20.
¹⁴ Diane Purkiss remarks that ‘there is not one Fall, but many.’ Purkiss, _The Witch in History_, p. 42.
The fact that Goddess cultures can be found to have flourished in the Mediterranean after the Neolithic Age, as well as in pockets throughout Europe, is interpreted to suggest that the religion survived and continued after the initial patriarchal attacks. Having a series of “Falls” is significant for the mythistory’s narrative of continuity. If the first “Fall” had been entirely successful then the mythistory would not span centuries and the movement would not be able to claim continuity. A series of “Falls”, however, is evidence that the Goddess culture managed to survive and that it continued to be the patriarchy’s foe. According to the Goddess writers’ representation, as the “Fall” period progresses, the violence against women appears to amplify. Over millennia the patriarchy’s aim to eliminate the Old Religion becomes increasingly systematic, intense and violent, culminating in the witch-hunts of the early modern period.

The first “Fall” in the series is the clash of two cultures – the invasions of Goddess-worshipping societies by warmongering patriarchal Indo-European tribes. Another “Fall” period occurs in Ancient Greece. The myths of this era feature as examples, according to Goddess writers, of the mistreatment and subordination, particularly, of Goddesses. During classical antiquity Goddesses lost their position of authority to sky gods before being completely obliterated by the transcendent monotheistic God of Judaism and Christianity. The witch-hunts of early modern Europe are perhaps the centrepiece of Goddess worshippers’ historical imaginary of the “Fall.” The alleged persecution of nine million witches (mainly women) is highlighted repeatedly in Goddess literature as evidence of patriarchal hatred and systematic violence against women. Linking early modern witches to pre-Christian Pagan societies is crucial in enabling Goddess writers to claim that Goddess worship, despite ongoing repression over millennia, continued and survived. In the same historical context as the witch-hunts, the development of the male medical profession is presented as a further example of the patriarchy consciously excluding women and denying their abilities and knowledges, particularly in midwifery.

This chapter will present Goddess writers’ versions of these tragic events, with an emphasis on the implications for gender in patriarchal religion and society. It will consider the writers’ particular constructions: their similarities and differences. It will comment on the necessity of the series of “Falls” for the overall Goddess mythistory. The “Fall” period will be analysed according to the emphases placed on certain eras and
themes by Goddess writers. Loosely presented in chronological order, analysis will commence with presentations of the first invasion, which marks the beginning of the “Fall” period, and will conclude, at the closing of the series of “Falls”, with portrayals of the early modern European witch persecutions. In between it will focus on themes that are predominant in the Goddess literature: firstly, changes in religion; secondly, changes in society; and, thirdly, the theme of survival.

I. The first “Fall”: the patriarchal invaders

The first clash of the “Fall” period is between a culture described by Marija Gimbutas as ‘matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, earth- and sea-bound’17 and its antithesis, being ‘patrifocal, mobile; warlike, ideologically sky oriented, and indifferent to art.’18

The invading tribes brought with them a different social structure, political system, economy, family organisation, as well as alternative attitudes to art and sexuality. Gimbutas’s choice of descriptors for the two cultures is representative of Goddess writers and, significantly, reveals their particular areas of interest. Commenting on whether a society is matrifocal or patrifocal, for instance, indicates a concern with kinship ties, living arrangements and inheritance issues. Whether a society is sedentary or mobile highlights considerations regarding settlement and the nature of the economy. In addition, in the theory of evolutionary history a sedentary society would be considered more civilised than a mobile, nomadic, pastoral19 society.20 Descriptions of a society as being peaceful or warlike interrogate a society’s morality and actions. Whether a society has an appreciation of the arts or not is, again, a comment on the

19 There is some inconsistency in Goddess literature with regards to the nomadic, patriarchal tribes being presented as pastoral or hunter/gatherer, when, in fact, they were probably a combination of the two. Carol Christ, for instance, refers to the nomadic groups as being pastoral. Carol P. Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality, Routledge, New York & London, 1997, p. 60. Merlin Stone, however, discusses them as being mainly hunters. Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman, Harcourt, Inc., Orlando, 1976, p. 62.
20 It is Goddess writers’ intention to differentiate the matrifocal, sedentary society from the patriarchal, nomadic, pastoral society as much as possible, presenting them as polar opposites. In contrast, anthropologists, such as Roger Keesing, remark on the co-existence of the two and how ‘the boundaries between sedentarism and nomadism, and between pastoralism and cultivation are by no means neat,’ Keesing, for example, explains ‘that the early food producers of the Near East had mixed economies of cultivation and herding.’ Pastoralism, he adds, allowed for adaptations to various weather conditions and vegetation. According to Keesing, ‘[p]astoral economies, developing in marginal zones around those where settled agriculture predominated, have for several millennia been closely tied to those of sedentary peasants and of states on whose peripheries they lay.’ The two types of society have relied on each other and many have dabbled in both forms of organisation. Roger M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, INC., Sydney, 1981, pp. 136–137.
degree to which a society is civilised. Being sky-oriented or earth-oriented reveals the nature of the religion regarding transcendence and immanence. In terms of these categories, the following section will argue that matrifocal culture is portrayed, by Goddess writers, as civilised and advanced, while the patrifocal culture is its antithesis — primitive and uncivilised. It is critical for the Goddess mythistory that Goddess civilisation be conquered by an uncivilised culture: if the invading culture were more civilised then the conquest could be understood to be part of evolutionary progression. In the case of Goddess religion, however, to be defeated by an immoral, primitive and uncivilised society implies that it was not part of any natural progression, but instead an unnatural “fall”. There is hope, therefore, that one day the tragedy will be corrected and the old civilised and moral culture will be resurrected. The “Fall” narrative, in fact, is crucial to the overall Goddess mythistory because, for instance, it allows for the possibility of a Goddess “Renaissance”.

This section will deconstruct the first clash, according to the Goddess writers’ representations, by, firstly, analysing the different characteristics of the attackers and the victims, as well as the perceived origins of the invaders. Secondly, it will consider the geography of the sites of conquest. Thirdly, the nature of the attack — whether it was wholesale or piecemeal — will be assessed. Fourthly, it will analyse explanations for the conquest.

The invaders’ traits and origins

In the Goddess mythistory the patriarchal invaders are accused of systematically invading and conquering the Old European Goddess society,21 ‘changing it from “gylanie” to androcratic and from matrilineal to patrilineal.’22 Merlin Stone states that the invaders ‘brought their own religion with them, the worship of a young warrior god and/or a supreme father god.’23 She claims that they appear in history as ‘aggressive warriors riding two abreast in horse-drawn war chariots’.24 In prehistory, she adds, they were represented ‘as big sailors who navigated the rivers and coastlines of Europe and

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21 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 20.
22 Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. xx. The term androcratic refers to a social system ruled or dominated by men. As mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis with regards to Z. Budapest’s coinage of terms, Goddess writers coin or re-work terms so that they do not just refer to the male gender, or to even make terms more woman-centred. This is part of the feminist re-writing of language.
23 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 20.
24 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 62.
the Near East.25 Gimbutas explicitly defines the invaders’ society (which she refers to as Kurgan) as patriarchal and emphasises the importance of the horse and weapons and other characteristics, all of which differ greatly from the Goddess cultures. She explains, for instance, that

[the basic features of the Kurgan culture go back to the 7th and 6th millennia BC in the middle and lower Volga basin – patriarchy; patrilineality; small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry, including the domestication of the horse not later than the 6th millennium; the eminent place of the horse in cult; and, of great importance, armaments – bow and arrow, spear, and dagger. These characteristics match what has been reconstructed as Proto-Indo-European by means of linguistic studies and by comparative mythology. They stand in opposition to the Old European gynecic, peaceful, sedentary culture with highly developed agriculture and with great architectural, sculptural, and ceramic traditions.]

It is apparent that the Goddess writers’ descriptions of the patriarchal invaders resemble the racist “Aryan Myth”, which valued masculinity, warrior characteristics, and transcendental spirituality – except, of course, the values are inverted in the Goddess mythistory.27 Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, as well as Merlin Stone, actually explicitly identify the invaders as being Aryan.28 The Goddess writers, therefore, believe in the myth of migrating Aryans, but unlike nineteenth-century nationalistic writers and twentieth-century Nazis, they condemn them for their institutions, behaviour and religion.29

Goddess writers are unspecific when designating the patriarchal invaders’ precise origins, but all of the various and, at times, ambiguous references to locations are generally within far-flung Russia – that is, to areas on the periphery of civilised Europe

25 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 62.
27 Late twentieth-century Goddess writers and nineteenth-century writers even employ the same terminology. They both, for instance, refer to this group as Indo-Europeans. See, for instance, the text, first published in French in 1855 and in English in 1856, Arthur De Gobineau, The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, Garland Publishing, New York & London, 1984, p. 457, footnote 1, where the Aryan race is called Indo-European.
28 For instance, in a description of the patriarchal invaders they describe them as follows: ‘[t]he Aryan Indo-European peoples were tall, big-boned and light-skinned. They had developed a superior war technology; using iron weapons and horse-drawn chariots ... these nomads swept down in huge hordes. In several migrations over millennia – into Greece, Europe, India – they looted, killed and enslaved the smaller, darker, agricultural Goddess-peoples, who lived in their bloody pathway.’ Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother of All, Rainbow, Trondheim, 1981, p. 58. Italics in original. See also Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 62.
29 The idea of an Aryan race, which was argued to be superior to other races, was popular in nineteenth-century anthropology, archaeology and history. For example, in De Gobineau, The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, Chapter XV, “The Three Great Varieties”, De Gobineau compares three races (which he categorises as black, yellow and white) and argues that the white race is superior. He then concludes with: ‘[a]mong the group of white races, the noblest, the most highly gifted in intellect and personal beauty, the most active in the cause of civilization, is the Arian race.’ De Gobineau, The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, p. 457. The myth proposed that the Aryan race was the source of western culture. The term was later embraced by Hitler, but rejected by non-Nazi scholars.
and the Near East. According to Marija Gimbutas, the culture of the patriarchal invaders developed in eastern Europe while Goddess cultures were flourishing in western and southern Europe.\(^30\) Most Goddess writers refer to the invaders’ place of origin from a selection of terms including the Pontic Steppe, the East, south Russia, the Volga basin, and the Caucasus. These areas are noted for their lack of urban centres, while the places that their inhabitants went on to invade are praised for their thriving cultured urban centres of civilisation (for example, Çatal Hiiyiük in Anatolia and Knossos on Crete).\(^31\) The implication is that the invaders had primitive living and social arrangements. In the Goddess mythistory, the invaders, therefore, do not come from urban centres of civilisation: they are clearly from the East and Russia, as opposed to the Near East or the Mediterranean.\(^32\) This depiction resonates with the perception of the western world, predominant at the time of the proliferating writing of Goddess literature in the 1970s and 1980s, of the East and Russia being uncivilised and threatening compared with the image of the West as cultured, stable and advanced.

In the Goddess mythistory the patriarchal invaders are presented as both northern invaders and as coming from the East, as Kurgans,\(^33\) or as Indo-Europeans.\(^34\) The Goddess writers’ reference to the same people as northerners and coming from the East appears to be contradictory. On the one hand, Merlin Stone repeatedly refers to them as

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\(^{30}\) Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. xx. Gimbutas’s description of the enemy Neolithic culture, that is, the patriarchal one, is representative of the textbook notion of the Neolithic, which Goddess writers challenge in their mythistory of the “Golden Age”.

\(^{31}\) Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, p. 62. A lack of urban or cultural centres suggests, according to Stone, that the invaders ‘may still have been nomadic hunting and fishing groups, possibly shepherds just beginning to practice agriculture.’ In the quote above Gimbutas, in contrast, mentions that they were practising ‘small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry’. Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. xx.

\(^{32}\) It is interesting that Stone refers to Russia and the Caucasus as the invaders’ northern homelands. Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, p. 62. Eisler refers to the invaders’ origins as ‘the peripheral areas of our globe’. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987, p. xvii. Kathy Ferguson points out that there are racial implications in Eisler’s reference to “our globe” as being centred in Europe. According to Ferguson’s understanding of Eisler, the Goddess cultures are perceived to have been white European, while the invaders are non-white people who “swarm” from the periphery. Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p. 112. Ferguson’s suggestion that there are racial implications in Eisler’s description, due to the nature of skin colour, are problematic because other Goddess writers suggest the reverse – that is, that the invaders were light-skinned. Rather, I would suggest that the Goddess writers’ construction pits the so-called civilised (from western and central Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East) against the so-called uncivilised (from Russia and the Caucasus).

\(^{33}\) According to Gimbutas, this new force is referred to as the “‘Kurgan’ culture” because “Kurgan” means “‘barrow’ in Russian, ‘since the dead were buried in round barrows that covered the mortuary houses of important males.’ Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. xx.

\(^{34}\) Merlin Stone, for instance, uses even more descriptors, as is exemplified in the following: ‘[t]hese northern peoples are referred to in various contexts as Indo-Europeans, Indo-Iranians, Indo-Aryans or simply Aryans.’ Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, p. 62.
"Northerners". Elinor Gadon also refers to 'the warrior cult from the North.' On the other hand, Marija Gimbutas implies that they come from the East: the East meaning Eastern Europe. This ambiguity, it can be demonstrated, depends on where in Europe or the Near East the writer is imagining the conquest took place. For example, if the reference point is Crete, then the invaders may be considered northerners. If, however, it is central Europe, then they would be considered to have come from the "East".

Goddess writers are careful to stress that the emergence of this new patriarchal culture does not mark the beginning of European civilisation. Riane Eisler, for example, claims that the rise of this new culture 'actually mark[s] the truncation of European civilisation'. It is necessary for Goddess writers to highlight this point because their mythistory commences with civilised cultures existing thousands of years before this juncture in history. It supports their assertion that the Goddess culture is the oldest of civilisations and the "natural" state. It suggests that the patriarchal conquest is a glitch in the otherwise linear, progressive pattern of the overall mythistory.

The nature of the conquest: when, where and how?
Goddess writers offer contradictory arguments about whether the patriarchal invaders seized power on a global scale, comprehensively throughout Europe, or were only successful superficially. They agree, however, that the triumph of patriarchy was due to external invasions that were gradual, systematic, and violent. In contrast, writers outside of the Goddess movement offer theories of internal developments to explain the cultural and religious changes.

There are a few Goddess writers who emphasise the universal nature of the conquest. Gloria Orenstein, for example, refers to the patriarchal conquest as a 'global

35 For instance, Chapter Four of Stone's book, When God Was a Woman, is entitled "The Northern Invaders". See Stone, When God Was a Woman, pp. 62–63, for several references to the "northern" tribes/peoples.
39 As mentioned in Chapter Two, the fact that the Goddess/women were responsible for the development of technologies during the "Golden Age" suggested development and progress. In this pattern, the patriarchal period could be seen as a temporary deviation from an otherwise progressive history.
matricide'. Likewise, Stein asserts that the change to patriarchal ways ‘was a world revolution.’ This view of universality, however, is undermined by the question of where the patriarchal warlords came from if all societies were originally matricentric. The descriptions earlier in this section of the invaders’ origins and waves of invasions from the East to the West, suggest that most Goddess writers primarily view the conquest as occurring in Europe, the Near East and the Mediterranean. Goddess writers’ descriptions, on the one hand, suggest that cultural domination was eventually complete in most parts of Europe. On the other hand, they evoke the Goddess worshippers’ resilience in surviving the marauding invaders, at least to some degree.

Gimbutas claims that the repeated clashes between the two European cultures occurred ‘roughly between 4300 and 2800 BC’. Similarly, as Carol Christ states, James Mellaart suggests that the patriarchal invasions started in the fifth and fourth millennia BCE. Diane Stein’s estimated transitional period is significantly earlier and longer than Gimbutas’s and Mellaart’s. Stein claims that the conversion to patriarchy commenced around 15 000–12 000 BCE and was over by 2 400 BCE. The earliest Sumerian documents date from about 2 400 BCE and reflect a patriarchal society, which is taken as further proof that the transition was complete by then. Merlin Stone claims that ‘[the Indo-Europeans’] arrival is archaeologically and historically attested by 2400 BC, but several invasions may have occurred even earlier.'
Most Goddess writers describe the patriarchal conquest as brutal, and as a catastrophic
destruction of the Old European culture, which implies that patriarchal male behaviour
is essentially aggressive and violent. For the Goddess mythistory, this brutal nature has
a specific implication. The more violent the conquest, the more resilient, it is argued,
the Goddess worshippers must have been. Merlin Stone, for example, discusses
aggressive invasions that led to the conquest of the Goddess cultures, but also implies
that conquest did not necessarily result in annihilation. Despite the conquerors’ efforts
‘to destroy or belittle the ancient worship’, Stone explains that ‘myths, statues and
documentary evidence reveal the continual presence of the Goddess and the survival of
the customs and rituals connected to the religion’.49 Marija Gimbutas highlights the
visible losses of the Old European civilisation, such as ‘the dethronement of Old
European goddesses, the disappearance of temples, cult paraphernalia, and sacred signs,
and the drastic reduction of religious images in the visual arts.’50 Like Stone, however,
she also stresses the continuation of Goddess culture. She argues, for instance, that ‘the
Old European sacred images and symbols were never totally uprooted; these most
persistent features in human history were too deeply implanted in the psyche. They
could have disappeared only with the total extermination of the female population.’51
Goddess writers argue that while physical and visible aspects of the Goddess culture
were eradicated, the Old Religion lived on in women.

It is in the interest of Goddess writers to stress that their religion and culture was not
destroyed because it was weak, primitive, or worthless. In fact, emphasis is placed on
their resilience, which enabled them to survive to some degree and in clandestine ways.
Evidence of Goddess worship’s continued existence is crucial to claiming that it still
has a significant role to play.

Three main theories can be offered to explain the change to patriarchy: an external
invasion, an internal evolution, and a combination of the two. Goddess writers
predominantly support the external invasion theory. According to Carol Christ, in
contrast, many scholars, such as the feminist archaeologist/anthropologist Margaret
Ehrenberg, support the contention that the transition to patriarchy was an internal

49 Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 20.
evolution. Carol Christ explains how Ehrenberg interprets the development of the iron plough as being instrumental in the change from matrilineal to patrilineal descent and in the rise of land ownership. This theory, however, is problematic for the Goddess mythistory because it challenges the idea of matricentric cultures existing throughout the Neolithic period, since plough agriculture developed during the Neolithic.

The theory of external invasion best serves the Goddess writers’ mythistory. Gimbutas bases her theory on archaeological evidence and describes the changes in matricentric Europe as being caused by invasions. Christ acknowledges that Gimbutas’s theory of an external invasion is not popular in scholarly circles, but she supports it by drawing on evidence from American frontier history. Christ contends that ‘we know from recent history in the Americas that indigenous cultures can be overthrown and nearly extinguished by better-armed, horse-riding invaders.’ Christ believes that scholars reject invasion theories because they are in denial and want to accept and promote evolutionary theories. Christ acknowledges the importance of the iron plough in transforming agriculture, and new technologies and weapons as leading to warfare, depending on the area. She concludes that ‘[i]t is likely that in some areas, internal developments prepared the way for the dominance of warriors, while in others, relatively peaceful agricultural societies were attacked by warlike pastoral nomadic groups’. She acknowledges that evolution explains some changes, but does not believe it accounts for everything, such as differences in burial practices and languages.

52 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 60. Most conventional scholarly histories, however, deny the theory of a pre-patriarchal society; that is, they understand society to have always been patriarchal.
53 Margaret Ehrenberg, Women in Prehistory, British Museum Publications, London, 1989, as paraphrased in Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 60. This argument suggests that the iron plough ‘allowed larger plots to be farmed by one individual; with the herding of larger numbers of animals for milk (rather than exclusively for wool and meat), which took the shepherd farther and farther from the home; and, ironically, with the increasing occupation of women’s time with their new invention, weaving.’ The implication is that if women are bound to the home then they lose autonomy and independence and men gain it to an extreme extent. This argument reflects 1970s/80s feminist ideas that associate women’s work with the “private” sphere (for example, with the family and the home), depriving them of power.
54 This topic will be explored further in Chapter Six.
57 Gimbutas, for instance, is rebutted by the archaeologist Geoffrey Ashe, who claims that there is no evidence of the invasions that Gimbutas proclaims. He is cited in Rene Denfeld, The New Victorians: A Young Woman’s Challenge to the Old Feminist Order, Allen & Unwin, New York, 1995, p. 135.
58 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 61.
59 In her opinion ‘there is an element of (self-serving) denial in theories that discount invasion as one of the primary modes of effecting cultural change.’
60 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 60.
between the two cultures. Furthermore, genetic evidence supports her emphasis on migration. Overall, therefore, she supports the invasion theory. In her opinion the institutionalizing of warfare as a way of life (however it occurs) is the single most important factor leading to the subordination of women. Warfare brings with it major changes in society, including kingship, large-scale land ownership and resultant class division, slavery, concubinage, and the subordination of women.

Likewise, Riane Eisler claims that the cultures based on the “Blade”, that is, ‘technologies designed to destroy and dominate’, were the cause of enormous changes. The internal evolution theory is problematic for the Goddess mythistory because it implies that Goddess culture naturally evolved into a patriarchal society and that changes were necessary or even of benefit to the society. The external invasion theory, in contrast, is supported by Goddess writers because it asserts that the changes to the peaceful society came from outside and disrupted a well-structured, moral and civilised society.

The initial stages in the patriarchal conquest commenced a train of events that occurred over several millennia, culminating in the witch persecutions. Two main changes that Goddess writers refer to throughout the “Fall” period concern religion and society. The first has negative implications for the Goddess and the second for women.

II. Changes in religion

This section will trace the portrayed changes in religion and the consequences for the Goddess commencing with the impact of patriarchal polytheism, particularly exemplified in Greek mythology, and followed by the even more destructive transformation to Christian monotheism. According to Goddess writers, the patriarchal

invaders practised a religion that was based on their own image. As Eisler argues, they brought 'male dominance along with their angry gods of thunder and war.' Denigrating Goddess religion was a crucial step in the invaders’ attempt to destroy Goddess culture. With the patriarchal conquest, Goddesses lost their independence, and became subordinated divinities defined by their relation to male gods. In the Greek pantheon, for example, Goddesses were demoted from positions of authority and dominated by sky gods. Goddesses suffered violence from the aggressive gods (in sexuality and/or in death) and lost their independence and autonomy in relation to procreation. Centuries later in Christianity the Goddess (in the guise of the Virgin Mary) was positioned in relation to Jesus or God and her role limited to being an asexual virgin mother. Nevertheless, Goddess writers argue that elements of the Old Religion remain, which is crucial for the mythistory’s narrative of continuity.

Subjugation of the Goddess in patriarchal polytheism

Most Goddess writers focus particularly on the Ancient Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses to highlight the Goddesses’ subjugation. In this context, the earlier Goddesses of Goddess cultures become assimilated into the polytheistic sky god pantheon that was dominated by Zeus from a transcendental position in the sky or high on Mount Olympus. In the polytheistic pantheons Goddesses’ personalities changed. They became subservient to gods and to their sons, their powers were diluted, and they were generally given lesser responsibilities. In the Greek pantheon Goddesses became wives and daughters of gods. The Goddess Hera, for example, became Zeus’s wife. As Gimbutas explains, Goddesses that were earlier parthenogenetic could no longer procreate without intercourse with a god. Losing independent fecundity is a huge defeat for a Goddess who had been revered for creating the world and everything in it.

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67 Downing, 'The Mother Goddess among the Greeks,' p. 49. Elinor Gadon describes Zeus as 'the thunderbolt God' who accompanied the invaders and 'who ruled with his contentious pantheon from the lofty heights of Olympus, imposing a patriarchal social order and culture on the peoples whose land they conquered.' Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 146. While this could be considered an evolutionary change, it is not in the interest of the mythistory to see it this way.
70 Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 318. Parthenogenetic means giving birth by oneself or creating offspring without a male. It is also known, therefore, as a virgin birth.
Goddess writers argue that becoming a wife is an enormous change to the Goddess and is the cause of her loss of autonomy and independence.71

Gods are portrayed as exhibiting their authority violently over Goddesses in all aspects of life. Numerous myths include tales of Goddesses being controlled and dominated sexually, and being the victims of violence and rape. In contrast, according to Diane Stein, the pre-patriarchal myths stand out for their lack of references to war, blood, and conquest.72 Stein explains that the Hellenic story of Demeter and Persephone features the rape of Persephone and her abduction from mother earth, both of which were absent from the pre-Hellenic (that is, original) account.73 In addition, in the Greek pantheon, it was acceptable for gods (including married ones) to be sexually promiscuous; they were never censured for this behaviour, even if it included rape.74 Gimbutas, for example, describes how ‘Zeus had to “seduce” … hundreds of other goddesses [other than his wife Hera] and nymphs to establish himself.’76 The sexual aggression of gods against

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71 This argument reflects second-wave feminist concerns about marriage oppressing women.
75 At this point Gimbutas inserts the evocative phrase: ‘with a nod toward historical accuracy, we might prefer the term “rape”’.
76 Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 318. Likewise, in an attempt to represent the Goddess writers’ mythistory, Graham Harvey conjures a grim picture of oppressed Goddesses. He explains that ‘the sky-Gods had mothers, sisters and daughters. They took wives and seduced or raped Goddesses, women or other female beings – and meanwhile fought each other for supreme power. Goddesses were allocated jobs that were beneath the dignity of the Gods, e.g. listening to the prayers of women in the labour of childbirth, agriculture or home-making.’ Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 73.
77 Carol Christ provides numerous examples of Goddesses’ loss of dignity and autonomy, such as the myth of Goddess Athena’s birth from Zeus’s head. Christ explains that, contrary to the image of Athena appearing ‘fully armed and prepared for battle, … the story of the defeat of the Amazons by the Greek army is depicted on Athena’s temple, the Parthenon.’ Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 64. In addition, Christ explains that in Aeschylus’s Oresteia trilogy Athena boasts about being motherless, credits the father with a parenting role and discredits the mother’s role as ‘merely cultivat[ing] the shoot’. Paul Roche, trans., “The Eumenides,” The Orestes Plays of Aeschylus, p. 190, quoted in Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 65. This understanding of reproduction, she claims, was a lie that was repeated for centuries.
78 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 65.
79 Goddess writers argue that controlling women’s sexuality in religion was mirrored in society. As Mara Keller asserts, ‘[t]he new male Gods typically solidified their authority in the heavens, as did the warrior-invaders on the ground, by abducting, raping and marrying women, priestesses, queens, or Goddesses of the region.’ Mara Lynn Keller, ‘Eleusinian Mysteries: Ancient Nature Religion of Demeter and Persephone,’ The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, no. 1, 1987, p. 10, as quoted in Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 158. The feminist philosopher Mara Keller, according to Elinor Gadon, ‘takes a historical approach, interpreting the myth as a mirror of the time of transition’. Keller is Director of the Women’s Spirituality programs in Philosophy and Religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies. She is a holistic philosopher and theologian. Specifically, she is a scholar and ritualist of the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. See: CIIS, ‘Mara Lynn Keller, CIIS California Institute of Integral Studies: Faculty,’ <http://www.ciis.edu/faculty/keller.html> (accessed 3 July 2007).
Goddesses repeatedly arises in Goddess writers’ descriptions of polytheistic pantheons and patently manifests contemporary concerns with violent male sexuality.

Another theme concerning violence in patriarchal myths is the slaying of the Goddess. The Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*, for example, features the slaying of the Goddess Tiamat by the god Marduk.\textsuperscript{77} In Ancient Greek mythology Apollo’s conquest of Delphi involves him slaying the Goddess Gaia and Zeus slays the Goddess Metis. Carol Christ describes the Goddess’s decline in Greek mythology as follows:

> [o]n mainland Greece, Apollo took over the holy site of Delphi, sacred first to Earth and her prophetess, after slaying the python, the sacred snake that guarded the sanctuary. This may be viewed as one record of the dethronement of the Goddess Creatress. In the Olympian mythology of Homer and the tragedies, Zeus, the Indo-European sky God, is named father and ruler of all the Gods and Goddesses.\textsuperscript{78}

In the story of Apollo’s conquest he violently slays a female dragon, which is believed to be ‘a source of evil.’ The dragon can also be understood to be a large snake (a python in Christ’s description above). As snakes are symbols of the Goddess in Goddess cultures, Christ infers that the Goddess was the victim.\textsuperscript{79} Slaying the python/snake/dragon, therefore, symbolises the violent slaying of the Goddess and supports the theory that the patriarchal religious ascendancy was an aggressive conquest and not an internal evolutionary change. Moreover, the myths in which Marduk or Zeus slay Goddesses are usually constructed in such a way that the gods are justified in murdering the Goddesses.\textsuperscript{80} The gods are glorified as murderers and, in contrast, the Goddesses vilified and their formerly respected roles discredited.\textsuperscript{81}

While the Goddesses were generally victims of violence, the Goddess Athena’s transformation into the militarised Goddess of warfare and protector of Athens shows how some Goddesses, in their new roles, were not just victims but, ironically, enforcers of violence. Athena was converted from ‘the Old European Bird Goddess, into a militarized figure carrying a shield and wearing a helmet.’\textsuperscript{82} Her transformation is emblematic of the changes in the Greek pantheon and, furthermore, of the changes that


\textsuperscript{79} Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{80} Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{81} Carol Christ provides examples of the myths and shows how violent the Gods are towards women and how they tend to discredit the importance of the Goddess in birth, death and regeneration, as well as how they glorify the killer. Another tactic is to ‘commit the ultimate sacrilege of defiling the womb that previous mythologies named as the Source of Life.’ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{82} Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. 318.
were mirrored in society regarding violence. Goddess writers emphasise the new culture’s focus on war to illustrate how significantly the earlier society was reconstructed. Athena actually takes on a male role, which is also that of the ruling class. This is a fascinating transitional stage in which the Goddess remains but becomes patriarchal. Athena, in effect, becomes a god in drag!

Despite the subjugation of the Goddess, Goddess writers read the patriarchal myths for subtle evidence of the Old Religion’s survival. It is crucial for the Goddess movement’s legitimacy to show that the patriarchy’s attempt to destroy it was never complete. Despite the Goddess being ‘deposed, slain, or made wife, daughter, or mother to the male divinities of the warriors, Carol Christ asserts that the Goddess did not disappear completely – symbols of the Goddess endured long after the conquests. Gimbutas, for example, explains that Athena was once considered to be a parthenogenetic Goddess, but in her new guise was born from Zeus’s head. On the surface, this is an extraordinary transformation, seemingly a complete destruction of Athena’s earlier image. Gimbutas, however, describes this demotion in a more positive light, finding in it remnants of the Old Religion. She provides, for example, an affirming interpretation of Athena’s birth. She reasons that ‘Zeus was a bull (in Indo-European symbolism the Thunder God is a bull), and Athena’s birth from the head of a bull was nothing else but a memory of birth from a bucranium, which was a simulacrum of the uterus in Old European symbolism.’ Thus, Athena’s birth is parthenogenetic after all.

Most Goddess writers focus on the Ancient Greek Goddesses when highlighting the survival of the Goddess in pre-Christian times. It is surprising that more is not made of Isis in Egypt, Atargatis in Syria and Cybele in Anatolia. M. Renee Salzman is an

83 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 171.
86 Christ explains that ‘[m]ost people are more familiar with the Goddesses from classical Greek and Near Eastern mythology than with the Goddesses of earlier times. These Goddesses, including Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, Inanna, and Ishtar, come from the warrior societies of the Bronze and Iron Ages. In the mythologies of these cultures, the Goddesses of the Neolithic and Paleolithic eras are slain or made subordinate to the new Gods of the patriarchal warriors, such as Zeus and Marduk. As classicist Jane Harrison points out, the writers of patriarchal mythologies are motivated by a “theological animus.” Their goal is to dethrone the Goddess and to legitimate the new culture of the patriarchal warriors.’ Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 62.
exception, tracing the adoption of Cybele by the Romans in 204 BCE\(^87\) and describing how the Goddess became known as ‘the Magna Mater or “Great Mother,”’ in Rome.\(^88\) Salzman explains that the Magna Mater was prominent in Rome for about seven centuries and that this highlights the importance of the Goddess in the Roman world.\(^89\) Perhaps this view of empowered Goddesses is not in the interest of the mythistory of the “Fall”. It suggests that the patriarchy was not as successful in destroying the Goddess religion as is maintained in most Goddess literature and Goddess writers would need to provide other explanations for the “Fall”.

**The Goddess’s demise under Christianity**

While the Pagan pantheons subordinated Goddesses, they nevertheless included them. The monotheistic religions, in contrast, have little or no role for Goddesses. Goddess writers argue, however, that the Goddesses of the Old Religion reappear in Christianity disguised as saints and the Virgin Mary. They are, however, shadows of their former selves without sexuality or autonomy.

With the emergence of Christianity the importance of the Goddesses waned and the importance of the Virgin Mary grew. In the sixth century the Virgin Mary appeared as Queen of Heaven and by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cathedrals were being constructed in her honour.\(^90\) The striking difference between the Virgin Mary and the Goddess of pre-patriarchal societies is that the Virgin Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus denies her any expression of sexuality. Furthermore, in contrast to Goddess religion, in which different phases of the lifecycle are celebrated, the Virgin Mary is always represented as a young mother. ‘Whether she is portrayed as the young virgin with child or the grieving madonna of the Pieta,’ as Wendy Griffin points out, ‘she is young, she is beautiful, and she is defined by her relationship to her son.’\(^91\) Only second to her ‘immaculate womb’, she is revered for her nurturing abilities.\(^92\) Like the

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\(^{88}\) Salzman, ‘Magna Mata,’ pp. 61–62.

\(^{89}\) Salzman, ‘Magna Mata,’ p. 66.

\(^{90}\) Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 203. For example, eighty were built in France from 1170 until 1270. See also: Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1979, p. 5.


\(^{92}\) Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 200. According to Gadon, ‘Her [the Virgin Mary’s] pilgrimage route in Western Europe’, for instance, ‘was known as “The Milky Way.”’ In addition, she ‘is shown as the nursing mother of the saints’ in Renaissance paintings.
Goddess, Mary is renowned for her mothering and nurturing role. Unlike the Goddess, she is asexual and does not experience all of women’s bodily cycles or stages of life. She is, thus, only a partial replica of the Goddess.

Goddess writers cite numerous examples in the Bible of women being suppressed as evidence of Christianity’s sexist attitude towards women and the Goddess. The Creation story, for example, is seen as a reversal of the original story and as explicitly misogynistic in blaming Eve for ‘original sin and the fall of “man.”’ Eve could not, allegedly, control her bodily passions, so is portrayed as irrational and emotional, while Adam is defined as her opposite, exhibiting rational control. Carol Christ claims that the creation story was written ‘with the deliberate intention of discrediting the worship of the Goddess.’ As the Adam and Eve story pervades society, Goddess writers offer an alternative view in pointing out that the biblical story is actually the inversion of an original myth, with an agenda to suppress and discredit the earlier religion.

Goddess writers tend to engage with Christian figures and stories, particularly the Creation story in the Book of Genesis and the Virgin Mary, to find aspects that were originally Pagan and, therefore, to show the continuity of the Old Religion. Elinor Gadon, for example, mentions several Goddesses, such as Isis, Artemis, Cybele, and Demeter, who she claims influenced the cult of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary is also regarded as a combination and assimilation of two aspects of the Goddess – the Virgin and the Mother, and an elimination of the third aspect, the Crone. Gimbutas suggests that the Virgin Mary’s popularity is attributed to her being, in effect, the Goddess in disguise. The scholar E. Ann Matter observes that ‘Mary certainly fits

94 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 66.
95 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 66.
96 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 66. Eisler alleges that ‘[t]he punishment of Eve for her refusal to acknowledge Jehovah’s monopoly of the tree of knowledge is a mythical device to justify male dominance and authoritarian rule.’ Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future,’ p. 28.
97 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 195.
98 Barbara G. Walker, The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1985, p. 13. The Crone was excluded because ‘the Crone phase was too darkly threatening to be so handled.’ Walker, The Crone, p. 13. ‘Like old women in general, the symbolic Old Woman haunted the fringes of Western culture, largely unnoticed and unacknowledged except when her “witchcraft” aroused a panic. Because she retained so much of her original prepatriarchal character, she is a valuable study object for modern feminists desirous of reassessing the female image.’ Walker, The Crone, p. 13.
99 Gimbutas describes the Virgin Mary’s “Goddess” qualities in the following: ‘[i]n later Christian times, the Birth Giver and Earth Mother fused with the Virgin Mary. Thus it is not surprising that in Catholic
neatly into the protective and sustaining role of ancient Near-Eastern fertility goddesses; her devotees may also have borrowed trappings from classical goddesses to clothe the Christian queen of heaven.\textsuperscript{100} Her resemblance to popular local Goddesses would have facilitated conversion to Christianity.\textsuperscript{101} It is also pointed out that ‘in the Catholic version of Christianity Mary, “the Virgin”, “Queen of Heaven”, is clothed in all the old goddess images – except that, significantly, she is not ‘Queen of Earth.’\textsuperscript{102} She is, therefore, a Goddess in appearance, but without sexuality, and her divine status is uncertain.\textsuperscript{103}

In Goddess literature, the attacks on Goddess societies led to a transformation of their religion and, in particular, of the Goddess. The formerly independent, empowering, and respected deity became a travesty of her former self. In her new position, subordinate to male gods, the Goddess became a victim of violence (rape and murder in patriarchal polytheistic religions) and a victim of control (sexual control in Christianity). Highlighting how the Goddess’s fall from grace occurred because of grave injustices is crucial to the Goddess mythistory. The ramifications of such a religious worldview for women and society will be discussed in the following section.

countries the worship of the Virgin surpasses that of Jesus. She is still connected with life-water and miraculously healing springs, with trees, blossoms, and flowers, with fruits and harvests. She is pure, strong, and just. In folk sculptures of the Mother of God, she is huge and powerful, holding a tiny Christ on her lap.’ Gimbutas, \textit{The Language of the Goddess}, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{101} Charlene Spretnak, for instance, claims that ‘[t]he church co-oped Mary in order to make converts. She is not included in the core symbols, i.e., the trinity, but the church fathers discovered they could not attract followers in the heavily Goddess-oriented Mediterranean and Celtic cultures ... without a Goddess on their banners’. In reality, however, according to Spretnak, ‘[f]ar from “elevating the feminine,” the church demoted her, stripped her of her power, and rendered her docile and sexless.’ Charlene Spretnak, \textit{Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths}, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978, p. 27.


\textsuperscript{103} See Matter, ‘The Virgin Mary: A Goddess?,’ in which the historian and professor of Religious Studies, E. Ann Matter, discusses the Virgin Mary’s status and considers whether or not she can be considered to be Christianity’s Goddess. In high points of Marian devotion, Matter believes that Mary ‘holds a place of such high esteem as to muddle the distinction between divine and human. Although never described as a goddess, she is certainly seen as more than a mere woman, however holy, could hope to be, set above all the saints and only a little lower than God.’ In low points, however, her powers are minimised. She adds that even in the Roman Catholic tradition, in which Mary is highly revered, it has ‘consistently maintained that devotion to Mary must be carefully distinguished from the worship due to God alone.’ Matter, ‘The Virgin Mary: A Goddess?,’ p. 80.
III. Changes in society: mirroring changes in religion

Goddess writers draw connections between patriarchal religions and society. They find a clear relationship between religious myths and the reality of social arrangement. In the Goddess mythistory of the “Fall”, for example, the subordination of Goddesses by sky gods was mirrored on earth in political, social and domestic spheres of life. The core changes in society concern the power relations between men and women, which become hierarchical, as opposed to egalitarian, and in favour of men. In becoming subordinate to men, women lost their positions of authority, autonomy and respect in the public, political, legal and social realms. Women, for example, became men’s property — legally and sexually. The warmongering new culture is portrayed as being preoccupied with weapons, hunting, war and death, to the detriment of the arts and peace. The purpose of such a mythistory is, again, to emphasise that the patriarchy is the antithesis of the Goddess culture.

In patriarchal societies, women no longer held positions of rule or authority in public or private life. A new way of life brought with it a new social organisation based on small patrilinear units that were socially stratified according to the strategic services performed by its male members. This new arrangement was, therefore, non-egalitarian. Women became the property of men, either of their father, husband, or other male family members and, as a result, were dominated in all areas of life, including sexuality.

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104 Gadon explains, for example, that ‘[t]he social system that ultimately evolved in the lands conquered by the Indo-Europeans was based on a system of dominance that mirrored the interpersonal relationships in their pantheon.’ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 111.

105 According to Riane Eisler, evidence of major changes between the two societies can be found in archaeology. See Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future,’ p. 29.


107 Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 70. According to Eisler, changes included the following: ‘We see the disappearance of millennial traditions of art and pottery, a sharp decrease in the size of settlements, the appearance of “suttee” chieftain tombs (so called because with the male skeleton are sacrificed women, children, and animals to serve him even after death). Warfare now becomes endemic, along with “strongman” rule, since these invaders, as Gimbutas writes, “worshipped the power of the lethal blade.”’ Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future,’ p. 29.

108 For example, ‘[a]s Christianity grew from a small cult of Jewish heretics to a world institution, it grew in its anti-goddess/anti-woman misogyny. Reflecting the Judaic position, women were to be silent and subservient, to own nothing in the law, and to be ruled by their husbands or fathers in all things. They were the vessels of original sin, since Eve had partaken first of Ashtoreth’s tree of life, and were to be punished eternally for her error. Men were the new images of God and his son, a God not of life and birth, but of the all-taker, of sacrifice on the cross.’ Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 10. Here, Stein is also making a connection between religion and society.
Sexuality

A focus on sexuality is a feature of Goddess literature as it is in feminist thought more broadly. Radical feminists, for instance, have considered men’s control over women’s bodies and sexuality to be a significant cause of women’s oppression. Goddess writers have embraced this approach and blame the sexual subordination of women during the “Fall” on the patriarchy. In the Goddess mythistory of the “Fall”, a major change in attitudes towards women was manifest in sexuality. Again, as the power relations played out in religion, it is inferred that the same occurred in society. While men could be promiscuous, women’s sexuality was controlled and monogamous. The invading northern warrior cults allegedly changed attitudes towards sexuality in the societies that they occupied. They brought with them ‘a process of domination’, which they ‘enforced in sexual and marital relationships’. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor explicitly accuse the patriarchy of preventing women from experiencing their sexuality, with regard to the enjoyment of sexual activity. Given that the patriarchal and pre-patriarchal societies differed in all aspects (including in sexual attitudes and behaviour), if the invading men were sexually aggressive, as the Goddess writers argue, then the implication is that men in the earlier Goddess societies were not, which suggests that male sexuality has not always been aggressive. It can be argued, therefore, that there is a possibility for an alternative male sexual behaviour in the future. If sexual relations were not unequal and violent before, then it does not have to be the case that heterosexuality is always going to be unequal. This possibility challenges the notion that aggressive behaviour is normal and that it is “natural” for women to be submissive and passive.

In matrifocal societies women were purportedly non-monogamous and the concept of fatherhood did not exist. In patriarchal societies, in contrast, men needed to be sure of who their children were; with property and land being inherited by individuals it became important for men to be aware of their offspring, which led to them controlling their wives’ sexuality. ‘Thus it was decreed’, Christ explains, ‘that women must be virgin at marriage and refrain from sexual intercourse with any man but their husbands.

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110 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 158.
112 Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 65.
113 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 173.
In this context the polarity between virgin and wife developed.¹¹⁴ Not only were women restricted to monogamy, but their sexuality was suppressed and devalued. According to Stein, for example,

[w]omen were held monogamous in arranged marriages, with marriage and heterosexuality only for the uses of procreation and legal lineage. According to the men of the time, women were not worthy of male love; true love was only between noble men, and love between women was considered of no value. It was a somewhat different patriarchy from that of the Jews, but patriarchy indeed, with women reduced from goddesses to property.¹¹⁵

Stein highlights women’s tragic position under the patriarchy, in which they were considered to be property and useful only for procreation.

Several Goddess writers illustrate how the term virgin had a different and empowering meaning in pre-patriarchal societies and early patriarchal societies of the transitional period.¹¹⁶ A virgin was considered to be a free, independent woman, who could be sexually active, if she chose to be.¹¹⁷ Ancient Greek virgin Goddesses, such as Artemis and Athena, were free to take lovers or refuse them.¹¹⁸ A virgin, according to Gadon, could be sexually autonomous and independent, free and wild – ‘true to her own nature and instinct, not maiden inviolate.’¹¹⁹ Athena’s virginity, for example, allowed her to ‘consort with men as an equal and engage in the masculine pursuit of war.’¹²⁰ To be a virgin Goddess was to be on a higher rung than a married Goddess, who was subordinated and tamed by her position in the patriarchal marriage.¹²¹ As a result, the unmarried, virgin girl or woman threatened the social order in patriarchal societies,¹²² and so, with time, was subjected to even more control than a married woman. By inference, the women remaining uncontrolled were the elderly who were spinsters or widows, unless they were controlled by their brothers or other male family members. Patriarchal men, therefore, are represented as being responsible for women’s oppression by controlling their sexuality. Consequently, women’s autonomy is presented as being closely linked to the control that they had over their own sexuality.¹²³

¹¹⁴ Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 173.
¹¹⁶ Including: Elinor Gadon, Carol Christ, and Naomi Goldenberg.
¹¹⁸ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 191.
¹¹⁹ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 191.
¹²⁰ Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 175.
¹²³ Goddess writers’ emphasis on sexuality reflects 1980s’ feminist ideas of female sexuality and autonomy.
Art versus weapons: cultured versus primitive

Another prominent theme in Goddess literature about the “Fall” is the interest that the patriarchy has in weapons at the expense, particularly, of cultured endeavours such as art production. Gimbutas, for instance, claims that the dagger-, sword- and shield-bearing Indo-Europeans ‘glorified the magical swiftness of arrow and javelin and the sharpness of the blade’, preferring to craft weapons to the detriment of artistic creations, such as pottery or sculpture. Goddess writers find that art (the choice of products crafted, and the techniques used) is a revealing source from which to understand changes in society. Gimbutas, for instance, understands the cessation of the production of artistic pottery and figurines to be a reflection of extensive change occurring in the old European civilisation. This interpretation is, primarily, a comment on how cultured the societies are. It forms part of the Goddess writers’ endeavour to indict the patriarchal culture as disinterested in the arts, and as being, therefore, uncultured and uncivilised.

Symbolism in art is perceived to reflect the values and priorities of the two different cultures. Gimbutas explains, for example, that

Old European ceramics are readily identified with the rich symbolic signs and decorative motifs that reflect an ideology concerned with cosmogony, generation, birth, and regeneration. ... In contrast, Kurgan pottery is devoid of symbolic language and of aesthetic treatment in general because it obviously did not serve the same ceremonial purposes as that of Old Europe.

The type of art produced in patriarchal societies is described as not comparing in aesthetic quality with that of the earlier artists and craftspeople. Gimbutas believes that the Kurgans’ techniques were primitive and their symbolism limited, as it focused only on the sun. Eisler describes patriarchal art as that which idealised ‘male violence and male dominance’ and ‘glorifie[d] killing (scenes of “heroic” battles) and rapes (as in Zeus’s fabled rapes of both mortal women and goddesses).’ The allegories in patriarchal art and the standard of artistic practice, therefore, constitute a loss of civilisation and culture.

125 Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 70.
126 Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture,’ p. 70.
The changes in society were pronounced in the relations between the sexes and in prioritising some skills over others, such as weapon-making over the arts. Such a mythistory paints a picture of certain male behaviour — sexist and hierarchical — which culminates in uncivilised warmongering societies. This depiction actually associates men with being uncivilised and barbarous, and implies that women are the antithesis, that is cultured and civilised, thus challenging the hierarchical binary oppositions that link men with culture and women with nature. This appears to be a significant departure from the pattern analysed in later chapters in this thesis, which, particularly in relation to the theme of ecology,\textsuperscript{129} embrace and celebrate the connections between women and nature. This major reversal reflects feminist attempts to challenge the binary opposition of males being linked to culture as females are to nature. It also challenges the privileging of the male category. Goddess writers would suggest that their mythistory attempts to quash the binary oppositions altogether. Their assumption is that dualistic thinking did not exist in the “Golden Age”; that is, it was introduced by the patriarchy. Women, therefore, can be associated with nature \textit{and} culture. Whether the Goddess writers successfully deflate the binary oppositions is questionable, and will be considered in later chapters.

All of the changes that occurred in patriarchal societies supposedly provide evidence to suggest that the patriarchy was uncivilised and subjugated women in all aspects of life. It is necessary for the mythistory of the “Fall” to show that all that is patriarchal is negative and primitive. To do so sets up the possibility of a reappearance of a society like the earlier more developed and civilised matricentric one.

\textbf{IV. Survival of the Goddess}

Despite all efforts by the patriarchy to appropriate Goddess cultures, a key theme in the Goddess literature is the insistence that Goddess culture managed to continue and survive.\textsuperscript{130} Goddess writers offer various explanations, which will be presented in three major arguments. The first argument is that Goddess cultures were preserved intact in pockets throughout Europe; for example, on the periphery of Christian society, underground in secret covens, and in Greco-Roman mystery religions. The second

\textsuperscript{129} This is explored in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{130} Eller, \textit{Living in the Lap of the Goddess}, p. 169; Eller, ‘Relativizing the Patriarchy,’ p. 286.
argument is that elements of the Old Religion were cleverly and subtly appropriated by the new religion in order to ease the transition. In this interpretation there is a power relation in which the new religion is dominant. The third argument is the assertion that the Old Religion was demonised by the new religion, losing its previous meanings and purpose, but that remnants of the old can be found in symbols and also in mythology, traditions and memory. In this interpretation Goddess writers believe that the Goddesses were acculturated by the new religion and their roles co-opted to fulfil new patriarchal agendas, to the extent that they became unrecognisable. Even so, with careful reading it is possible to find subtle references and symbols of the Goddesses’ earlier personae. Overall, most writers’ descriptions of the Old Religion surviving during the “Fall” are a combination of these different models. In describing the three explanations for the survival of Goddess religion, the following section will argue and illustrate how the survival narrative is crucial to the Goddess mythistory. It will become evident that the narrative of survival is a complex integration of interpretations, rather than a single simplistic story.

The emphasis of the first argument is that the Old Religion survived intact usually in clandestine ways on the fringes of society, particularly in rural areas. The general notion of the religion surviving in Europe in rural villages, the countryside, and forests is a common theme in the literature, particularly with regard to the survival of the Old Religion in the early modern period as witchcraft. Some writers refer to fairies as

131 With reference to the Goddesses changing from early European Goddesses into Christian saints, for example, they are sometimes viewed as not losing their original traits and at other times having them completely inverted. The Virgin Mary, for example, is interpreted in several ways. Some interpret her as simply the Goddess under a new name. Stein, for example, declares that ‘Mary ... was obviously the great mother and Christ her god-consort son. It was often just a matter of changing the god’s and goddess’ names.’ Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 11. Spretnak views Mary as ‘a direct descendant of the Goddess, producing her child parthenogenetically (that is, by herself), a son born with the coming-of-light at winter solstice and renewed, even after death, at the vernal equinox.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 274. At the same time Spretnak claims that Mary is an inverted Goddess, being ‘chaste and docile.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 274. Spretnak argues that Mary ‘was made into a physically passive and nearly neuter symbol of a patriarchal dream queen, often presented by clergy as a model of subservience against which women should measure themselves.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 275. Some recognise that it was a clever tactic to embrace the Virgin Mary, suggesting that she was given a significant role in Christianity ‘in order to wean people away from the worship of the Mother Goddess.’ Kevin Marron, Witches, Pagans, & Magic in the New Age, Seal Books, McClelland-Bantam Inc., Toronto, 1989, p. 22. Another example of how writers combine different approaches in the one breath is illustrated by John and Caitlin Matthews in the following comment: ‘By this time the shaman had either become a priest of the new religion or continued to function in the old one, albeit secretly’. Caitlin Matthews and John Matthews, The Western Way: A Practical Guide to the Western Mystery Tradition. Volume I: The Native Tradition, Arcana, London, 1985, p. 133. They are implying that the Old Religion was assimilated into the new, in the beginning of the sentence, and also that it continued intact in secret.

examples of survivors. Barbara Walker, for instance, claims that fairies were driven into exile by Christian priests and, thus, practised their rites in sacred and isolated areas of Europe. She explains that

> [t]he women who were called “fairies” in medieval Brittany carried on a worship of this Mother in her sacred groves, and were sometimes described as “moon goddess” (mandevent) themselves. Other groups of women who preserved the Old Religion were called Korrigen; they dwelt on islands off the coast, especially the “sacred isle” now called Sein, or Isle of the Saints.

Even if the followers of the Old Religion were increasingly forced to the periphery of society and into isolated areas, the important point here, for the Goddess mythistory, is that the religion nevertheless continued to exist intact. Urban centres are clearly not encompassed in the geography of survival.

Goddess writers describe the “mystery cults” as an example of the Old Religion being practised in secret and outside of mainstream patriarchal religion in the Ancient Greco-Roman world. The mystery cults are also known as secret cults or mystery religions and the best-known are the Dionysian and Eleusinian. According to Marija Gimbutas the mystery religions were infused with the Old European religion. Elinor Gadon and Gimbutas conclude that the mystery cults were followed in the Greco-Roman world because the official patriarchal religion did not satisfy individuals’ spiritual needs. The Old Religion, therefore, maintained its relevance.

The common theme in the above examples is that the Old Religion survived by being practised underground, in hiding or in secret. The inference is that the Old Religion was able to survive if it was practised outside of the influences, pollutants, and restrictions of patriarchal mainstream culture. The implication here is that given suitable conditions

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133 Walker, *The Crone*, pp. 126–127. Kevin Marron gives a specific example ‘that some Stone Age tribes survived in isolated pockets of Northern Europe and Britain, just as a few primitive peoples can still be found in remote parts of the world today.’ Like Walker’s version, in this theory these “survivors” are presented as being ‘the original elves or fairies, the “little people” who were fabled in folklore for their magical powers and their ability to make themselves invisible.’ Marron, *Witches, Pagans, & Magic*, p. 22.


135 It is interesting that in the Goddess mythistory of the “Golden Age” urban areas are hailed as centres of thriving Goddess culture. In the “Fall” period, in contrast, cities are where patriarchal culture dominates.

136 Elinor Gadon explains that ‘[b]y their very nature the mysteries were secret; initiates were forsworn [sic] not to reveal the details of their transformative experience.’ Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 143.


138 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 146; Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, p. 319. Gadon, for example, claims that ‘[t]he enigma of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the extent of their appeal indicates the power the Goddess still had over the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire (third century B.C.E. to fifth century C.E.).’ Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 143.
it could exist in the future. Overall, the fact that it supposedly survived, both in suitable and in less than conducive conditions, implies that it fulfilled people’s needs and remained relevant.

The second argument is that the dominant religion (for example, patriarchal polytheistic Paganism or Christianity) incorporated elements of the Old Religion to smooth the transition to the new religion. By highlighting the fact that elements of the old appeared in the new, Goddess writers claim that this is proof of a survival; the old is simply existing in disguise. Co-existence, however, is never without a power differential that is unfavourable to the old woman-centred religion. Even if the appropriation is seemingly positive (that is, not altering the Old Religion), it is, nevertheless, appropriation of the Old Religion by the new. Some Goddess writers present a positive view of the new religion appropriating the old. Gimbutas provides examples of some Goddesses that retained their traits despite the dominance of patriarchal polytheistic pantheons. She alleges that in many areas in Europe some Goddesses retained their independence and remained unmarried, such as Artemis (Greek), Brigit (Irish) and Laima (Baltic).

Many Goddess writers emphasise that the conquest was slow, lasting over several millennia, and that the new and old religions, in fact, co-existed for centuries. Starhawk presents a picture of people following the Old Religion while simultaneously adapting to the new and claims that ‘for hundreds of years the two faiths coexisted quite peacefully.’ Not only did they co-exist in parallel, but she claims that ‘[m]any people followed both religions’. For example, according to Starhawk, ‘country priests in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were frequently upbraided by church authorities for

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139 Goddess writers do not acknowledge this because it is not in the interest of their mythistory.
141 According to Helen Berger, for example, the mythmakers claim that ‘the religion died out slowly as the nobility and eventually the commoners were converted to Christianity.’ Berger, *A Community of Witches*, p. 21.
dressing in skins and leading the dance at the pagan festivals’. The country priests practised two religions, despite this behaviour being disapproved of by the Church.

The transition to patriarchal Paganism and Christianity would presumably have been made smoother by familiar elements of the Old Religion appearing in the new. Rather than being completely eliminated, some Goddesses of the Old Religion are described as appearing as Christian saints and their sites of worship becoming churches. Setting important days in the Christian calendar at similar times to pre-patriarchal Pagan feast days and rituals also facilitated the change to Christianity as ‘the holidays of the old religion were incorporated into Christianity.’ For example, Stein explains that

Christ is born at Yule, or three days after it in the current Western calendar, following a series of miraculous (psychic?) occurrences to Mary, the dates of which follow the goddess’ Sabbats. Christ’s Easter (the word comes from ‘egg’, and Eostar or Oestar are goddess names of the Spring Equinox Sabbat), is on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the equinox.

Kathryn Rountree claims that ‘[s]easonal rituals continued to be carried out, many elements of which still persist in the customs of Christmas, Easter, May Day, Midsummer, All Hallows, and many saints’ days.’ From the perspective of Christianity, it was a wise tactic to assimilate familiar elements of the Old Religion into the new, to ease the change to the new religion. The Old Religion would gradually be appropriated by and merged into the new. Here the Goddess writers have been describing the assimilation in a positive sense. From the perspective of Goddess worshippers, the fact that their religion was being incorporated demonstrates its continued relevance. Goddess writers understand this appearance of the new religion as being the old one in disguise. Surely, though, it would be the intention of the incoming

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144 Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ p. 261. Caitlin and John Matthews also suggest that people exercised ‘their dual membership of old and new religions’, despite the ‘intermittent sniping ...[by] the Church’. Matthews and Matthews, The Western Way, Volume I, p. 133. They add that this occurs ‘in much the same manner as modern Japanese still avouch themselves both Shinto and Buddhist.’ Italics in original.

145 When discussing the transition to Christianity in Goddess literature there is some ambiguity, at times, as to whether Goddess writers are referring to pre-patriarchal Paganism (such as Goddess worship) or to patriarchal Paganism (such as Ancient Greek polytheism). Overall, I perceive their discussions that include the general term Paganism to equate with pre-patriarchal Paganism. In their chronology of events, therefore, they often omit the phase of patriarchal Paganism.

146 See Chapter Six for further discussion of Pagan sites of worship becoming Christian churches.

147 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 21. This practice of embracing important Pagan festivals will be discussed in Chapter Six.


149 Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 222. Here, without attributions, Kathryn Rountree is following Barbara Walker. She includes the following sentence from Walker’s work: ‘Many such rituals still persist to this day, in the customs of Christmas, Easter, May Day, Midsummer, All Hallows, and many saints’ days.’ For a comparison, see Walker, The Crone, p. 127.
religion to incorporate the old one. The survival of the old religion, therefore, could be viewed as a clever tactic on behalf of the victors, as well as being due to the resilience of the Old Religion.\(^{150}\)

The third argument of the Old Religion’s survival concerns the demonisation of its key figures and features. Some Goddess writers suggest that Goddesses have been demonised to the extent that they are shadows of their former selves. Diane Stein, for example, describes the Goddess Hera as ‘a constant matriarchal thorn in Zeus’ side’.\(^{151}\) Hera suffers an ungraceful decline from being considered ‘the great mother, queen creator of all the universe and birthing source of all life’ of earlier times to being seen as ‘no more than a nagging wife’ in Classical Greece.\(^{152}\) In Stein’s description, Hera has unquestionably been trivialised.\(^{153}\) Charlene Spretnak searches for remnants of earlier Goddess culture concealed beneath the layers in patriarchal myths.\(^{154}\) Spretnak describes the Goddesses’ inverted forms in patriarchal myths and their earlier powerful and respected roles in the following excerpt:

Hera, the disagreeable and jealous wife of Zeus, was a powerful deity of women and all fecundity long before his arrival; Athena, the cold, boyish daughter of Zeus, wasformerly a protector of home and the arts; Artemis, who had been made the sister of the new god Apollo, was formerly the wild forest presence in Arcadia and the protector of women in childbirth in her manifestation at Ephesus; and Pandora, who was made into the troublesome, treacherous source of human woes, was actually the maiden form of the Earth Goddess who poured bountiful gifts from her earthen jar.\(^{155}\)

Helen Berger also points out the demonisation of the Old Religion by the new.\(^{156}\) As saints, the old Goddesses became diminished and unrecognisable, losing their independence in all areas including sexuality. It is in the interest of the Goddess mythistory to look for traces of the Old Religion in the new inverted manifestations. Evidence of links to the Old Religion shows that the Ancient Greek Goddesses, for example, are not the Goddesses’ original personalities, but altered characters. To show that the Ancient Greek version of Athena\(^{157}\) actually has links to Neolithic agricultural

\(^{150}\) The thesis of acculturation, however, is not original to the Goddess mythistory.


\(^{157}\) Christ, incidentally refers to Athena in the ancient Greek pantheon as ‘a very patriarchalized Goddess and a traitor to her sex’. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 67.
Goddesses demonstrates that the later manifestations have feminist roots, origins and histories and that their original personas have suffered at the hands of the patriarchy.158

It is necessary for Goddess writers, on the one hand, to show that the conquest was violent and destructive of the Old Religion in all ways – to show that their ancestors were the victims of grave injustices. On the other hand, to claim that the Old Religion survived, either in hiding or in co-existence, shows the strength of Goddess religion in resisting domination. A conquest in which Goddess religion continued to exist under adversity best supports the portrayal of the Old Religion as being resilient. This line of argument would also conclude that their culture did not disappear due to evolutionary factors. Even if the original Goddesses are changed beyond recognition, it is empowering for contemporary Goddess worshippers to recover symbols or hints of the Old Religion to remind them of how it once was and how it can be once again. Despite the Old Religion’s resilience, the witch-hunts of early modern Europe show the patriarchy at its worst and increasingly hinder the Old Religion’s ability to survive.

158 Carol Christ looks particularly at the Goddesses who have had their former characteristics inverted to the extent that they are barely recognisable, and yet she is able to highlight connections between the Goddesses of classical times and their earlier manifestations, as she does in the following excerpt: ‘Hera, an indigenous Goddess whose sanctuary at Olympia was older than that of Zeus, becomes the never fully subdued wife of Zeus. Athena is born from the head of Zeus, but her temple on the mountain, the rock outcropping of the Parthenon hill, and her companions, the owl and the snake, remind us of her connection to the Mountain Mother and the Lady of the Animals. Aphrodite retains her connections to the dove and the goose.’ Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, p. 172. Here Christ highlights ‘many survivals of Old European religion’ in classical mythology. She finds symbols that connect Athena to ‘the Old European Goddess.’ ‘The olive tree she produced in her contest with Poseidon’, for example, ‘connects her with agricultural Goddesses.’ Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 68. In Christ’s descriptions the Greek goddesses have been negatively assimilated. Graham Harvey explains that while some former Goddesses became Christian saints, their roles were very much diminished. He explains that ‘[n]ot all the richness of the divine could be portrayed in female form: patriarchy would not tolerate too much independence. Women, especially female saints, could not be uppity but had to be mainly virginal and meek.’ Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 74.

While some symbols related to Goddess culture did indeed survive in Christian art and legend, they often had their significance changed to the extent that their former meanings were recognisable. The snake, for example, formerly a symbol of the Goddess and fertility, became a seducer, as Gadon explains in her interpretation of the book of Genesis. She remarks that ‘[t]he snake, symbol of the Great Goddess, had been transformed into a veritable “snake in the grass,” a seducer who tempted Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and she gave Adam a bite.’ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 187. Diane Stein also mentions the reversed meaning in the imagery of the snake. She explains that ‘[s]nakes, long known as goddess symbols for their self-renewing shedding of old skin, are loathed and feared.’ Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 27. The labyrinth is another symbol associated with the Goddess that appears in mediaeval times. The pattern can be found ‘laid out on church pavements’, in large gardens and even cut into turf, such as the round labyrinth known as ‘Julian’s Bower’ on a hillside, not far from a monastery, in Northern Lincolnshire. Geoffrey Ashe, Labyrinths and Mazes, Wessex Books, 2003, pp. 22, 25. Hereford Cathedral’s late thirteenth-century “Mappa Mundi” (World Map) actually represents Crete with a labyrinth. Ashe, Labyrinths and Mazes, p. 22. For further discussion on the labyrinths in the “Golden Age”, see Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, pp. 18–19; Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, pp. 106–107; Carol Christ’s essay: Carol Christ, ‘Who is Ariadne?’, Ariadne Institute, <http://www.goddessariadne.org/ariadnegoddess.htm> (accessed 9 September 2007).
V. The witch-hunts of early modern Europe

The witch-hunts of early modern Europe feature as the most significant aspect of the “Fall” in the Goddess worshippers’ historical imaginary; Goddess writers present the witch persecutions as a “genocide” and “holocaust” against women. The enormous scale of the inquisitors’ misogynistic project is reiterated in Goddess literature by the regular mention of the figure of “nine million” witches executed. This representation and usage of evocative terms is in stark contrast to the previous section, in which the contact of the two cultures was explained in terms of co-existence, incorporation and appropriation. In the Goddess mythistory of early modern witchcraft, Goddess writers challenge the conventional negative stereotype of the witch as dark, broom-flying, devil-worshipping, and entirely malevolent. Most Goddess writers re-define this image as a resilient, positive image of a wise, independent, and knowledgeable woman, with strong links to the pre-patriarchal Pagan past; some writers, such as Starhawk, offer a broader definition. Goddess writers perceive the patriarchy’s anxieties about gender to be the prime cause of the witch persecutions. They assert that women’s knowledge, attitudes and skills, in relation to healing, midwifery, independence, and sexuality, were threatening to the patriarchal institutions of religion, marriage, and medicine. In challenging long-held definitions of witches and explanations of the persecutions, the Goddess mythistory of the witch-hunts is one feminist re-writing of witchcraft history.

The following elucidation of the Goddess mythistory of the witch-hunts will, firstly, present the Goddess writers’ representations of the type of women who were persecuted; secondly, analyse the Goddess writers’ use of the “nine million” figure and provocative terminology; thirdly, point out the unspecific references made to geography and chronology; fourthly, outline the Goddess writers’ contention that gender issues are the cause of the witch persecutions; fifthly, it will consider the importance of Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English’s argument, for Goddess writers, that midwives and healers were persecuted as witches because they threatened the developing male medical profession. Finally, the nature of Goddess writers’ engagement, or lack of engagement, with particular sources that discuss the witch-hunts (for instance, Margaret Murray, and historians of early modern witchcraft) will be assessed. Overall, this section on the witch-hunts will consider how the Goddess writers’ construction
challenges other witchcraft histories, is empowering for its followers, and serves the broader narrative of the "Fall".

As would be expected, Goddess writers overwhelmingly maintain that the witches persecuted in Europe during the early modern witch-hunts were mainly women, as do academic historians of the early modern witchcraft persecutions.\textsuperscript{159} Goddess writers promote a particular representation of the early modern witches that emphasises their connection with the Pagan past\textsuperscript{160} and asserts that they were independent and unrestricted by men. Most Goddess writers point out that the persecuted witches were not malevolent penis- or baby-eating women, as the witch-hunters proclaimed, but were wise women who were continuing the Pagan tradition.\textsuperscript{161} Kathryn Rountree objects to the representation of witches as 'poor, harmless and defenceless old women'.\textsuperscript{162} She asserts that they were a challenge to the inquisitors because of their connection to the Pagan past, highlighted by their participation in activities of 'illicit healing, sorcery, incorporating magical charms in their healing'.\textsuperscript{163} Vivianne Crowley also stresses that witches 'were not worshippers of the Christian devil nor solely victims of a witch-hunting paranoia, but followers of the indigenous, nature-based religions of Europe.'\textsuperscript{164} Marija Gimbutas also highlights the persecuted women’s connection to the Old Religion. She claims that '[t]he burned or hanged victims were mostly simple country women who learned the lore and the secrets of the Goddess from their mothers or grandmothers.'\textsuperscript{165} In these descriptions the witches are imagined in a rural setting with connections to and knowledge of nature. The key theme is the emphasis on witches continuing and preserving the Pagan traditions. This theme is greatly influenced by

\textsuperscript{159} In other words, there is nothing new in the Goddess writers’ claim. Historians of early modern European witchcraft agree that around 75–80 per cent of the victims were female. See, for example: Wolfgang Behringer, \textit{Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History}, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004, p. 158; Anne Barstow states that ‘over 80 percent of the victims were women.’ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, ‘On Studying Witchcraft as Women’s History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions,’ \textit{Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion}, vol. 4, 1988, p. 7; Brian Levack claims that in most areas in Europe, more than 75 percent prosecuted for witchcraft were women, and that in some area the figure was more than 90 percent. Brian Levack, \textit{The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe}, Longman, London, 1987, p. 124. For recent historiography in the area of the European witch-hunts, see: Behringer, \textit{Witches and Witch-Hunts}, Chapter Four: “The European Age of Witch-Hunting”, pp. 83–164; Owen Davies, \textit{Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951}, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 1999.

\textsuperscript{160} Throughout this section the term Pagan past refers to the pre-patriarchal Pagan past; that is, to pre-patriarchal Goddess worship.

\textsuperscript{161} Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 221.

\textsuperscript{162} Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 221.

\textsuperscript{163} Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 221.


\textsuperscript{165} Gimbutas, \textit{The Language of the Goddess}, p. 319.
Margaret Murray, who argued that witchcraft was actually a Pagan fertility cult that had survived since ancient times in underground covens. In *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches* she developed the theory that by burning witches the Church was persecuting a thriving underground religion.\(^{166}\)

In addition to criticising the black witch image, Rountree is appalled by the description of witches as victims, which she has observed is not an uncommon practice among historians (including feminist historians).\(^{167}\) According to Rountree, adopting this approach ‘is to ignore or deny the challenge these women represented to the dominant institutions within their societies.’\(^{168}\) Rountree is thus re-defining women’s role in the witch-hunts away from the images of victimhood and evil to a position in which witches held special knowledge and demonstrated agency, both of which would have been a challenge to the controlling patriarchal institutions.

Starhawk has a far broader definition of the type of women persecuted. She claims that

> \[\text{the vast majority of victims were not coven members or even necessarily witches. They were old widows whose property was coveted by someone else, young children with “witch blood,” midwives who furnished the major competition to the male-dominated medical profession, freethinkers who asked the wrong questions.}\]\(^{169}\)

These old women, children, midwives and freethinkers, however, are not presented as victims, but as challenges to male institutions. They are independent in regards to property ownership, their thinking, behaviour and occupation. Starhawk also expands her description to include so-called burdensome women and temptresses. Her list includes ‘the elderly, the senile, the mentally ill, women whose looks weren’t pleasing or who suffered from some handicap, village beauties who bruised the wrong egos by

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\(^{167}\) Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 221.

\(^{168}\) Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ pp. 221–222.

\(^{169}\) Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ pp. 261–262.
rejecting advances, or who had roused lust in a celibate priest or married man. On the one hand, the accused are feeble women who are unprotected by men. On the other hand, they are women who are independent of, and a challenge to, men. In another description, Starhawk concludes that the accused were mostly ‘women in the lower strata of society. Especially at risk were widows, spinsters, and those who were unprotected by a man. ... The Witchhunts, then, were directed against women as a sex and against the peasant-laboring class.’ Here Starhawk includes a social aspect in her definition of the persecuted. Starhawk’s definitions, therefore, are all-encompassing, covering women from a range of backgrounds and classes, with various skills. What is common among them, however, is that they are unmarried. They are not able, therefore, to be controlled by men via the Christian institution of marriage.

Even though Starhawk’s definition of the persecuted is broader than Rountree’s, they both, as do most Goddess writers, define the accused with an emphasis on them being challenging because of their independence from men. For Rountree, for instance, whether a woman is a midwife, spinster, or widow, the crucial point is that she is an independent woman with independent knowledge and power and, as a result, is a challenge to patriarchal institutions, knowledge and control. The emphasis here is on the fact that the accused were independent and, thus, challenging, rather than being defenceless, easy targets. Again, the significant point is that these women are represented as having had agency, rather than being presented as victims.

It is not surprising that the Goddess writers’ descriptions of early modern witches, from their feminist perspective, differ markedly from their representation of the early modern inquisitors’ definitions of witches, which they attribute to the witch-hunters’ misogyny and delusion. According to Starhawk, for example, in the ‘enormous campaign of

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171 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 188.
173 Another point of difference between the writers is that most portray witches as the Inquisition’s sole focus. Starhawk is unusual in acknowledging that ‘Jews and “heretical” thinkers’ were also persecuted by the Church. Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’’ pp. 261–262. In contrast to most representations of witches and Pagans of the early modern period, Caitlin and John Matthews discuss the ‘ugly side’ of those following the Old Religion. They suggest that ‘[t]o have one’s spirituality derided, to lose one’s livelihood, to see one’s family suffer did not inspire feelings of goodwill: those with the power to heal and hurt often chose to hurt in vengeance and retribution.’ Matthews and Matthews, *The Western Way, Volume I*, p. 133. According to the Matthews, some of the accused did in fact align themselves with the devil. They claim that ‘[t]he notion of the Devil as God’s opponent had been propounded from pulpits both Catholic and Protestant. Under threat of persecution by their oppressor, some did turn for active support from the Devil: if God allied himself to the persecutors, let them join the opponent of God.’ Matthews and Matthews, *The Western Way, Volume I*, pp. 133–134.
propaganda', witches were presented as having 'sold their souls to the devil,' as practising 'obscene and disgusting rites,' as well as blighting crops and murdering children.174 Elinor Gadon and Starhawk claim that in addition to devil-worshipping, witches were also accused of 'having actual social and sexual intercourse with him [the devil]175 and partaking in 'feats that were fantastic and bizarre, that contradicted our ordinary grasp of reality',176 such as 'night flights, turning people into animals, and charming away penises and hiding them in birds' nests.'177 Starhawk explains that '[w]e are tempted to conclude that somebody must have suffered from full-blown paranoid delusions.'178 Despite the vast differences between Goddess writers' representations of witches and the inquisitors' definitions, Goddess writers find hints of the Old Religion in the inquisitors' descriptions. This way they can point out that the inquisitors have, in fact, dramatically misinterpreted age-old figures and traits. What the inquisitors "pervert' into the figures of the devil and the Anti-Christ, for example, was, according to Goddess writers, originally the Horned God. The Horned God in the Old Religion 'as the spirit of the hunt, of animal life and vitality,' was, of course, 'a concept far from the power of evil that was the Christian devil.'179 Witches were accused of sexual crimes against men, of being organised, and of using magical powers affecting people's health.180 Goddess writers attribute the accusations of sexual intercourse with the devil, of sexually corrupting men, and of obscene rites, to the Church's inhibitions about sexuality. As Starhawk explains, '[w]itches were free and open about sexuality - but their rites were "obscene" only to those who viewed the human body itself as filthy and evil.'181 Goddess writers are rewriting women's position in relation to their sexuality. They are re-defining early modern women as having control and agency over their sexuality, as opposed to being considered deviant or submissive. The new position

175 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 212. Starhawk, among others, makes the same point. See, for example, Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, pp. 186-187.
176 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 187.
177 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 187.
178 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 187.
179 Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," pp. 261-262; See also Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 212.
180 Ehrenreich and English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses, p. 26. Ehrenreich and English are not Goddess writers, but are included in this section because of their important influence on Goddess writers, particularly in regard to their argument that midwives and healers challenged the emerging male medical profession. This argument will be discussed later in this section.
challenges the hierarchy and control that men had in heterosexual relations as presented in establishment witchcraft history.\textsuperscript{182}

Goddess writers are not only occupied with the personas of the persecuted women, but also with the numbers killed, which is generally claimed to be nine million. Elinor Gadon, for example, declares that ‘[a]s many as nine million people, mostly women, were tortured and put to death in a fanatical outburst against that constellation of beliefs and practices we have come to recognize as the way of the Goddess.’\textsuperscript{183} Similarly, Marija Gimbutas emphasises a high figure. She states that ‘[t]he murder of women accused as witches escalated to more than eight million.’\textsuperscript{184} As well as stipulating a figure, Starhawk also specifies the proportion that were women. She alleges, for example, that ‘Pope Innocent the VIII, with his Bull of 1484, intensified a campaign of torture and death that would take the lives of an estimated 9 million people, perhaps 80 percent of whom were women.’\textsuperscript{185} Elsewhere, Starhawk’s figures cover an enormous range. For example, she claims that ‘[e]stimates of the actual number of Witches executed range from 100,000 to 9,000,000. The higher estimates include many who were not officially executed but died in prison.’\textsuperscript{186} Elinor Gadon attempts to provide some perspective on the figures. She asserts, for instance, that ‘in some villages in Europe there were no women left alive’.\textsuperscript{187} In a sweeping overview of the patriarchal endeavour to destroy the Old Religion, Judith Todd makes claims similar to those of Gadon, stressing that ‘[w]omen bore the brunt of this attack’, but she also mentions men, which is an unusual practice in the Goddess literature. She claims that ‘[s]ome nine million women were burned to death or otherwise killed. The records reveal that in several villages only one woman was left alive. But men, too, were killed for practicing the Old Religion, or just for being effeminate.’\textsuperscript{188} Showing that incredibly large numbers of women were persecuted is part of the endeavour to emphasise the seriousness of the witch persecutions. As Starhawk implies, however, the exact figures

\textsuperscript{182} For another interpretation, see Barbara Walker’s work. She claims that the ‘[w]itch persecutions were one more manifestation of men’s never-ending effort to deny that negative archetype, the Crone Mother who can destroy.’ Walker, \textit{The Crone}, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{183} Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{184} Gimbutas, \textit{The Language of the Goddess}, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{185} Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ pp. 261–262.

\textsuperscript{186} Starhawk, \textit{Dreaming the Dark}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{187} Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 113.

are not as important as 'an understanding of the climate of terror that was unleashed.' Goddess writers aim to present this period as one of the most tragic examples of the war against women in the whole of history and the inclusion of a figure as high as nine million powerfully illustrates and supports their contention. After all, the figure of nine million continues to evoke great suffering from its comparison with tragedies such as the six million Jews systematically killed by the Nazis during World War II.

The Goddess writers' employ particular rhetorical strategies and comparisons with other atrocities, particularly the Jewish holocaust, to stress the significance and tragic nature of the witch-hunts. Terms such as “murder”, “death”, “torture”, “terror” and “Burning times” recur in descriptions of witch persecutions. The “Fall”, particularly the “witch-hunts”, is often referred to as the “holocaust” by Goddess writers. Morning Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 187.

189 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 187. Goddess worshippers’ version of the early modern witchcraft persecutions is epitomised by Charlie Murphy’s modern folk song The Burning Times, (‘about the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’), which commences as follows: ‘And the Pope declared the Inquisition, it was a war against the women whose power they feared. In this holocaust against the nature people, nine million European women died. And the tale is told of those, who by the hundred, holding together, chose their deaths in the sea, while chanting the praises of the Mother Goddess, a refusal of betrayal, women were dying to be free.’ Quoted without reference in Crowley, ‘Women and Power in Modern Paganism,’ p. 129. Charlie Murphy is an American songwriter whose music about Paganism was produced in the 1980s.

190 The claim that nine million witches were murdered during the witch persecutions in early modern Europe is strongly disputed by historians of the early modern witch persecutions. Joanne Pearson, ‘Witches and Wicca,’ in Joanne Pearson (ed.), Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age, The Open University, Milton Keynes, 2002, p. 163; Levack, The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe, p. 19. Brian Levack acknowledges that while it is difficult to determine numbers, ‘nine million’ is a ‘gross exaggeration’. He estimates that the total tried for witchcraft throughout Europe was less than 100 000 and that 60 000 witches were executed. Levack, The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe, pp. 20–21. Joanne Pearson explains that the figure of nine million was calculated in the late eighteenth century in Germany and that the figure was subsequently repeated by German historians, published in Matilda Jocelyn Gage’s book Women, Church and State in 1893, and later picked up by twentieth-century writers of Wiccan and feminist texts. Pearson, ‘Witches and Wicca,’ p. 163. Mary Daly, for example, picks up on the figure of nine million from Gage’s book. See Daly, Gym/Ecology, p. 183 (in the footnote). Wolfgang Behringer also traces the origins of the figure of nine million to the eighteenth century and the ‘methodological nonsense’ of Gottfried Christian Voigt’s (1740–91) projections. Furthermore, Behringer points out that the exaggerated figure was adopted by the neo-Pagan movement in Germany, by Nazi feminists, and used in Nazi propaganda. Behringer, Witches and Witch-Hunts, pp. 157–158. Considering recent achievements in historical research, Behringer concludes ‘that there were at least 50, 000 legal executions for witchcraft in Europe, but despite gaps in the sources and a lack of research in some areas we no longer expect that the numbers could increase by more than 20 per cent.’ Behringer, Witches and Witch-Hunts, p. 149. See Table 4.5, p. 150, for specific figures.


192 For instance, Starhawk describes the period as a ‘reign of terror that was to hold all of Europe in its grip until well into the eighteenth century.’ Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 5. Elinor Gadon refers to the witch persecutions as ‘the ultimate example of misogyny.’ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 113.

193 See, for example, Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 113, where she says that holocaust is ‘an apt name’. See also: Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ p. 262; Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 5.
Glory and Otter G’Zell, for example, assert that ‘[t]he violent suppression to the point of eradication of the followers of Wicca by the Inquisition can only be compared to the Jewish Holocaust of Nazi Germany (estimates of the number of martyrs run as high as nine million!).’ The Goddess writers are obviously appropriating a powerful trope in our culture with their use of the term holocaust. As Diane Purkiss contends, ‘the narrative of the Holocaust has become the paradigmatic narrative for understanding atrocity in the late twentieth century.’

Other tactics include referring to the witch persecutions as genocide and as a precursor to Stalin’s murderous regime. Diane Stein, for instance, refers to the persecutions as ‘a female genocide that virtually depopulated much of Medieval and Renaissance Europe.’ Gimbutas alleges that the witch-hunts were a precursor to Stalin’s atrocities five centuries later. She claims that ‘[t]he period can boast of greatest creativity in the discovery of tools and methods of torture. This was the beginning of the dangerous convulsions of androcratic rule which 460 years later reached the peak in Stalin’s East Europe with the torture and murder of fifty million women, children, and men.’ Goddess writers rank the witch-hunts among the most horrendous periods in history. Describing the witch-hunts as a holocaust and genocide, as well as referring to enormous numbers executed, implies that the persecution of women was a violent and systematic effort to annihilate half of the population. This takes the symbolic changes in religion, described earlier, to another level. The witch persecutions happened to real living women, as opposed to Goddesses.

Most Goddess writers are unspecific about the location and time of the persecutions; when they do mention an area it is usually simply Europe and time periods are equally indefinite. Starhawk, however, refers to particular areas in her descriptions; she

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194 Morning Glory and Otter G’Zell, ‘Who on Earth Is the Goddess?’, in James R. Lewis (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, SUNY Press, Albany, New York, 1996, p. 31. Similarly, Gloria Orenstein illustrates the use of the term holocaust for purposes of comparison with other persecuted groups. While she does not refer specifically to the period of the witch-hunts, she is referring to the “Fall” period more generally. Orenstein claims that ‘the ravishment of our prepatriarchal Goddess cultures by invading hordes of Indo-Europeans, who brought sky gods and war to more peaceable and earth-revering matristic cultures, was as traumatic for women, historically, as was the Holocaust for Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and other so-called undesirables, who also lived through the desecration and destruction of their cultures.’ Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, p. 5.


198 Historians of early modern witchcraft, in contrast, are careful to stress how different the witch persecutions were at different times and in different locations. This point was reiterated during the panel.
specifies, for example, that '[s]o-called torture went on for days and nights, as in Germany, and sometimes it was limited to an hour at a time, as in Italy and Spain. So-called torture was banned altogether in England, where starvation, deprivation of sleep, and gang-rape did not count as torture.'

Given that early modern historians suggest that the witch-hunts were sporadic during the mediaeval period and that the mass-persecutions occurred periodically during the late fifteenth century until the seventeenth century, Goddess writers attention to the time periods of the witch-hunts is unspecific, and, at times, inaccurate. Starhawk, for instance, declares that the church began the persecution of witches (as well as others) in 'the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.'

Gadon, however, refers to '[t]he witch persecutions of the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries'. Whatever the case, the references to geography and chronology provide the mythistory with a sense of the “Fall” consisting of real historical events.

Historians of medieval and early modern Europe offer numerous theories for the mass witch-persecutions, which include economic reasons, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the development of print media, the mentality of those in power, the power of the state, and gender anxieties. Writers of the Goddess mythistory almost exclusively view gender anxieties as the cause of the witch-hunts. Witches, according to Goddess writers, were threatening to the patriarchy because of their power and their knowledge, as Diane Stein argues in the follow excerpt:

discussion of the “Gender and Witchcraft” session at the “Network for Early European Research” conference at The University of Western Australia, 7 July 2007, including Charles Zika, Sarah Ferber, Peter Sherlock, Elizabeth Kent, and Jacqueline van Gent. See also Susanna Burghartz, 'The Equation of Women and Witches: A Case Study of Witchcraft Trials in Lucerne and Lausanne in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,' in Richard J. Evans (ed.), The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History, Routledge, London & New York, 1988, p. 61.

199 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 188.
201 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 113.
202 Barstow, however, argues in her journal article on the historiography of the European witch persecutions that of all the reasons, historians surprisingly pay insufficient attention to the matter of gender. She explains that ‘[h]istorians have in fact interpreted the witch-craze as the result of religious upheaval, of the growth of the nation-state, of the isolation of mountain folk – of anything, in short, rather than of what women were doing or were perceived as being.’ Barstow, ‘On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History,’ p. 7. See Barstow, ‘On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History,’ pp. 7–19, for an outline of the different causes that historians of early modern Europe use to explain the witch persecutions.
203 Caitlin and John Matthews are the exception in Pagan and Goddess literature. They blame persecutions on the Protestant Reformation. They believe that medieval Catholicism had close links with the Old Religion and that Protestantism severed these connections. For further discussion see Matthews and Matthews, The Western Way, Volume I, p. 133.
204 For example, according to Gadon, ‘[t]he social and political forces that led to this holocaust ... are complex, but the root cause was fear of the power of women.’ Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 113.
woman's crime at this time in history was the fact and power of her existence, of the existence of goddess worship despite all repressions, and of the survival among women of ancient knowledge and healing skills that were the state of the art science of the time. Rountree suggests that witches' involvement in healing was threatening because it challenged the nascent male medical profession, while their alleged connections with the Pagan past were a challenge to the church's authority. In general women threatened patriarchal control and were 'always suspected of a less than total commitment to the patriarchal God who had declared them accursed.' Starhawk views witch-hunts as part of a revolution that benefited 'the rising monied-professional classes', by exploiting 'women, working people, and nature.' The persecutions, she adds, 'helped to undermine the possibility of a revolution that would benefit women, the poor, and those without property.' Goddess writers rewrite explanations of causality in terms of sexuality and feminist knowledge, combined, in Starhawk's case, with a social focus.

A prevailing theme in the Goddess historical imaginary is the belief that wise women and healers were targeted as witches because they challenged the emerging male medical profession. Women are seen as competing with men professionally, due to their particular female and Pagan knowledges (of women's bodies and reproduction), as

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206 Rountree, 'The New Witch of the West,' p. 221.
208 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 189.
209 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 189. She adds that '[a]s part of that change, the persecution of Witches was linked to three interwoven processes: the expropriation of land and natural resources; the expropriation of knowledge; and the war against the consciousness of immanence, which was embodied in women, sexuality, and magic.' Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 189.
210 Starhawk's following piece evokes the precarious atmosphere in which midwives and wise women practised during the Inquisition. The negative ramifications of their occupation were felt heavily by other women – in this example by the accused's daughter. Starhawk reflects: '[t]he birth is a difficult one, but the midwife has brought many women through worse. Still, she is worried. She has herbs to open the womb and stop the blood, herbs to bring sleep, and others to bring forgetfulness of pain. But now her baskets are almost empty. This year she could not go gathering at the proper times of the moon and sun. The new priest and his spies are everywhere – if she were to be caught digging simples in the moonlight it would be sure proof of witchcraft, not just against herself but against her daughters and sisters and her daughter's daughters. As she pours out the last of her broth for the laboring woman the midwife sighs. "Blessed Tana, Mother of mothers," she breathes softly, "When will the old ways return?"' The child is in a state of shock. Her memories of the last three days are veiled in a haze of smoke and noise that seem to swirl toward this climax of acrid smells and hoarse shouting. The priest's grip is clawlike as he forces her to watch the cruel drama in the center of the square. The girl's eyes are open, but her mind has flown far away, and what she sees is not the scene before her: her mother, the stake, the flames. She is running through the open field behind their cottage, smelling only clean wind, seeing ordv clear sky. The priest looks down at her blank face and crosses himself in fear. "Devil's spawn!" he spits on the ground. "If I had my way, we'd hold to custom and burn you too!" Starhawk, *Witchcraft and Women's Culture*, pp. 259–260. The ending provides a sense of the resilience that females can summon from belief in the Old Religion. Despite the actions of the misogynist priest, the young girl will survive because she has her faith.
well as their use of intuition. Ehrenreich and English, authors of *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, have detailed the suppression of witches in medieval Europe and the parallel development of the male medical profession.\textsuperscript{211} Witch-hunts against midwives and healers are suggested to have been an essential step in the effort to professionalise medical practice. This endeavour to gain control, authority and status required the marginalisation of those outside of the medical profession, that is, midwives, healers, and so-called witches. Again, women’s special knowledge and social position as healers is represented by Goddess writers as the cause of their persecution. Ehrenreich and English’s work is embraced by Goddess writers.\textsuperscript{212} Their work represents an early phase of feminist critique of patriarchy\textsuperscript{213} and although they are not Goddess writers, their representation perfectly suits the Goddess writers’ perspective. Like Goddess writers, Ehrenreich and English have an essentialist view of women’s body, emphasise women’s autonomy and women’s special knowledges; thus, it is unsurprising that midwives become the heroines in both representations.

To support their particular mythistory of the witch-hunts, Goddess writers engage with works that have long being discredited in academia, such as Margaret Murray’s, and, in general, disregard the wealth of information from experts in the field (including feminist historians). This practice raises interesting questions about how knowledge is or is not transferred from academe to non-specialists and popular culture. Starhawk’s account of the witchcraft persecutions, for instance, which she presents in the section “Appendix A: The Burning Times: Notes on a Crucial Period of History”, comes from Mary Daly, Ehrenreich and English, Margaret Murray, Wallace Notestein and Rosemary Radford Ruether.\textsuperscript{214} Interestingly, Daly, Ehrenreich and English, Murray, and Ruether are

\textsuperscript{211} Ehrenreich and English stress that midwives, healers and witches were persecuted because of the special knowledge that they used in performing their medical work; therefore, in this view the witch-hunts were an attempt to control knowledge. In attacking peasant healers, the Church believed it was attacking “magic” and the devil’s powers, not scientific medicine. Ehrenreich and English maintain, however, that witch-healers actually used trial and error in their work, thereby being more empirical in their approach, in fact, than male doctors. In contrast, they imply that the Church was anti-empirical as it relied on faith. Ehrenreich and English argue that the early male medical profession was not scientific in approach, but highly superstitious. They state that ‘[t]here was nothing in late medieval medical training that conflicted with church doctrine, and little that we would recognize as “science”.’ Ironically, in their representation, the Church attacked the only general medical practitioners the poor and diseased could possibly access. Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, pp. 29–32.

\textsuperscript{212} See, for instance, Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 237. The scholar Kathryn Rountree also cites Ehrenreich and English’s work in Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ pp. 222, 223.

\textsuperscript{213} Ehrenreich and English’s work has long been dismissed by historians of early modern witch persecutions. See Burghartz, ‘The Equation of Women and Witches,’ pp. 66–67, 70.

\textsuperscript{214} In a footnote Starhawk explains: ‘[t]his account of the Witch persecutions is based on Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*; Ehrenreich, Barbara, and English, Deirdre. *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of*
regularly quoted in Goddess literature as source material even though they are non-specialists. On the other hand, the specialist historians of early modern European witchcraft are rarely cited. As mentioned earlier, Murray’s work has been extremely influential despite the fact that her ideas have been criticised by historians of the early modern European witch persecutions as well as by critics of the Goddess worshippers’ version of the past. Her thesis, that witches persecuted during the early modern period belonged to a Pagan religion that had survived underground since pre-Christian times, was not new when her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* was published in 1921. According to Ronald Hutton this notion had been around since the previous century; what Murray added ‘was to provide apparently good documentary evidence for it.’215

Hutton explains that at the time her first two books were published she was criticised by experts in the field. Later, however, in the 1940s and 1950s her work found a large audience, along with popularity, and by the 1960s was the dominant theory of early modern witchcraft.216 At this time there was a lack of historical research, in the English speaking world, into the early modern European witch trials.217 With this dearth of historical work, ‘[u]ntil the late 1970s,’ Hutton claims, ‘it was possible to have an up-to-date knowledge of early modern history and to believe in that thesis [that is, Murray’s]; after that time it was out of the question.’218 In the 1970s research in early modern witchcraft underwent a resurgence and, as a result, historians such as Alan Macfarlane,219 Keith Thomas220 and Norman Cohn221 discredited Margaret Murray’s evidence.222 These studies into the witch trials that occurred in particular locations in

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221 The historian Norman Cohn suggests that witchcraft was a delusion invented by the Inquisition. See Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, p. xii. Interestingly, writing in 1975, Norman Cohn was concerned with the influence that Margaret Murray’s book, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, had in stimulating ‘the extraordinary proliferation of “witches’ covens” in Western Europe and the United States.’ Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, pp. 107–108.
England and Europe did not suggest that early modern witches belonged to a surviving ancient Pagan religion.223

Murray did appear, however, to receive support from the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg’s work. The fact that he claimed that some ‘witches from the Italian province of Friuli’, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, who called themselves the “benandanti”, were members of a fertility cult, appeared to give Murray’s thesis academic support.224 Levack and other early modern historians, however, dispute the claim that Ginzburg’s work supports Murray’s.225 Hutton explains that Ginzburg’s book *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* was first published in Italian in 1966, but not translated into English for another seventeen years in 1983.226 In the interim, he points out that English-speaking historians were mistranslating Ginzburg’s work and claiming that he had discovered a surviving Pagan religion in the early modern period.227 Ginzburg, however, does not argue that the accused were consciously continuing to practise witchcraft underground. The accused were actually Christian and Ginzburg limits his source material to a certain time and location, which is a stark contrast to Murray’s thesis. Despite this difference, Pagan authors, such as Caitlin and John Matthews, quote Ginzburg to support their

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225 Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, p. 17. Levack does not believe that Ginzburg’s book actually supports Murray’s thesis that the sixteenth and seventeenth-century witches were Pagans. In his preface to the English edition, Ginzburg credits Murray as telling a “kernel of truth”. Ginzburg is the one historian who is believed to support Murray and, as a result, is adopted by Goddess writers. According to Ginzburg, however, he is misinterpreted. Ginzburg writes: ‘Murray had asserted: (a) that witchcraft had its roots in an ancient fertility cult, and (b) that the sabbat described in the witchcraft trials referred to gatherings which had actually taken place. What my work really demonstrated, even if unintentionally, was simply the first point. While there is an indisputable connection between benandanti and fertility cults (in this respect, I think, we should acknowledge the “kernel of truth” in Murray’s thesis), no document allows us to conclude with certainty that the benandanti actually met on set occasions to perform the rites described in their confessions.’ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983, p. xiii.
227 Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, p. 276. Hutton explains that the historians who were doing research in the 1960s and 1970s were mainly American and were not well-read in Italian. As a result the early impact of Ginzburg’s book in the USA ‘was initially filtered through William Monter, who in the process created a widespread impression that Ginzburg had revealed the existence of a “genuine” surviving pagan witch religion in early modern Italy.’ See Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, p. 276, for further examples of American historians who saw Ginzburg’s book as clear support of Murray’s thesis. Hutton contends that Ginzburg ‘indignantly disowned’ the views of the American historians and also contradicted himself in his preface to the English edition, which could have also contributed to the confusion about whether his work supports Murray’s or not. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 276–277.
arguments. In recent decades Murray’s work has been considered romantic and to lack critical historical method.

It seems, on the surface, that Goddess writers respond to academe by simply ignoring their critiques. Despite the substantial criticisms, Murray’s ideas, for example, continue to be circulated and cited in Goddess literature. Another explanation could be that the scholarly criticisms simply do not reach some Goddess writers. Ronald Hutton suggests that developments in academic scholarship often make limited impact due to time lags, the information not getting out, and practitioners being hostile to academe. Information sometimes does not reach a mass audience because that is not the scholars’ intention; they may be interested in addressing a specific academic audience. While some theories were dismissed in academe decades earlier, they have made comebacks, presumably because the criticisms did not make it out into popular culture or because there is a popular consumer market for the dismissed theories. If the non-academic public or non-specialists are not up to date with the academic criticisms then they are unaware of what was earlier discredited and may recirculate these ideas decades later.

In the overall mythistory of the “Fall”, the witch-hunts are important because they are portrayed as an example of the patriarchy’s hatred and desire to eliminate a large proportion of the female population by systematic persecution. The Goddess writers’ use of emotive terms and comparisons with atrocities such as the Jewish holocaust, gives this narrative even more support. The time of the witch-hunts is significant because the portrayed fact that healers and followers of the Old Religion were still pursued in the early modern period shows that, despite ongoing attempts, the Old Religion had managed to continue for centuries. The mythistory also asserts that the

228 The Matthews, for example, cite Ginzburg in their book, The Western Way: A Practical Guide to the Western Mystery Tradition. They describe Ginzburg’s The Night Battles as ‘a study of pagan survival within the context of agrarian cults’. Matthews and Matthews, The Western Way, Volume I, p. 134. Diane Purkiss has also found that Ginzburg’s work is known in the Goddess movement. She remarks: ‘[o]ne of the witches I met gave me an account of her own participation in night battles (under that name), which had, she said, been going on since the Middle Ages between white and black witches. . She added that “some book by Clineburg, I think” had described these battles.’ Purkiss, The Witch in History, p. 44.


232 As contemporary Pagans are renowned for being avid readers (see Chapter Four Section II), they are likely to find a lot of Goddess related texts in second-hand bookshops. They are unlikely, however, to come in contact with academic critiques.
negative images of witches and women were invented by the patriarchy, thus criticising the inquisitors and the Christian church. In contrast, the Goddess writers argue that the witches were independent women – uncontrolled by men either because they were not married, used their instinctual and intuitive female knowledges (particularly with regard to healing and to childbirth), or were financially independent. In all cases the women held some type of power over the men, so are presented positively – even if they were old or ugly – rather than as victims.

**Conclusion**

The themes to have arisen from the “Fall” narrative concern, primarily, the destructive behaviour of the patriarchy against a cultured and peaceful matricentric society. At the same time emphasis is placed on the latter’s ability to survive despite the grave injustices it faced. As has been illustrated, the first “Fall” is crucial for the overall mythistory to highlight that the change to a patriarchal society was not a natural, evolutionary progression. Rather, it is presented as a fall into an uncivilised and primitive state, due to external forces – the northern/eastern patriarchal invaders.

The suggestion of a series of “Falls” serves to illustrate the Goddess cultures’ resilience and suggests that they fulfilled important needs. The elucidation of the changes that occurred in religion and society during the “Fall” illustrates that the patriarchal conquest was gradual, unjust, unnatural and sporadic. The changing roles of the Goddesses over time and in the different pantheons is understood, by Goddess writers, to reflect the changing power relations between men and women in society. The theme of survival is of particular importance for the overall mythistory as proof of the Goddess religion’s resilience and relevance. The survival narrative is, in fact, a combination of theories of survival, which include: firstly, survival in pockets or on the periphery of patriarchal society; secondly, the coexistence of the old and new religions; thirdly, the demonisation of the Old Religion – the Old Religion survived, but was transformed beyond recognition.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the “Fall” mythistory is the persecution of witches in early modern Europe. This tragic period is presented by Goddess writers as a conscious plan to eradicate the last vestiges of women’s strength, power and knowledge that had survived since the “Golden Age” in the form of witchcraft. Whether they were
widows, elderly, or midwives, in the Goddess mythistory women were persecuted because they challenged the patriarchal institutions and/or were independent of men. The Goddess writers' choice of sources, particularly of non-specialists, to support their mythistory provides us with a fascinating insight into the transference of knowledge between specialist academic areas, such as history, and non-specialists.233

Despite the ‘Fall' being a tragedy for Goddess worshippers, it is also part of an empowering paradigm. Firstly, it works to unite devotees of the Goddess, as critics have noted. Helen Berger, for instance, has observed that ‘by viewing their religious practice within historical terms, they [practitioners] develop a shared past.'234 Historical periods or events provide contemporary Goddess worshippers with historical groups to identify with. Persecuted witches from the early modern period, for instance, have emerged as martyrs235 in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is through the historical groups of women, such as wise women, healers, holders of special knowledge, and survivors of the Old Religion, that contemporary Goddess worshippers purportedly regain threads of knowledge from the past. Secondly, the loss of the “Golden Age” gives authenticity to Goddess worshippers' struggle to return to the lost paradise.236 Thirdly, the survival of elements of the Old Religion in pockets on the periphery of patriarchal culture throughout history is, at least, proof of its continued existence and relevance. And, if it can exist on the periphery then there is hope that it can one day exist in the centre.237

It is important, for Goddess religion, to highlight the argument that the existence of patriarchal religions during the “Fall” does not mean that it has always been the case that male deities have been revered. As the feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether declares, ‘[m]ale monotheism has been so taken for granted in Christian culture that the peculiarity of imaging God solely through one gender has not been recognized. But

233 The issue of transferral of knowledge also raises questions regarding the possible problems of interdisciplinary work in academia. As was pointed out, it is not only Goddess writers who rely on non-specialists for an understanding of early modern history. Scholars from areas other than history, such as Crosby and Rountree, cite non-specialists rather than engaging with the enormous body of work on the topic by specialist historians of the early modern European witch-hunts.
234 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 22.
235 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 22.
236 Purkiss, The Witch in History, p. 16.
such an image indicates a sharp departure from all previous human consciousness". If patriarchal religions have not existed since the beginning of time, then it could follow that they will not necessarily exist in the future. The corollary is that Goddess religion and matrific cultures may return.

Many attitudes of the Goddess writers reflect the broader political and feminist environment in which they were writing. Goddess writers' construction of the patriarchy during the "Fall" represents gods and men as violent, hierarchical, and dominating over Goddesses and women in all areas of life. The patriarchy is viewed in hierarchical opposition to women. This representation reflects second-wave feminist representations of the patriarchy in several ways. Firstly, highlighting the sexual aggression of gods against Goddesses reflects the writers' concerns with violent male sexuality, which is a feminist position central to 1970s/80s feminist theory. Secondly, the mythistory of the Goddesses being subordinated to and then supplanted by patriarchal gods is a feminist argument about the patriarchy. The Goddess's subordination reinforced the self-image of second-wave feminists, who were concerned about women's positions of inferiority and dependence on men in society. The representation of Goddesses being subordinate wives in the polytheistic pantheon reflects 1970s feminist critiques of marriage, which attacked the institution for the way it placed women in a position of dependence on men and under their control. Thirdly, the Goddess writers' interest in midwives and the work of Ehrenreich and English occurred at a time when reproductive rights were a priority for the women's movement. Finally, in challenging history and negative images of women during the "Fall", Goddess writers fit into the feminist project of rewriting history, a process through which women regain knowledge, control and agency.

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239 As Rosemarie Tong explains, many radical feminists view sexuality to be the primary issue of feminism due to the fact that 'aggression and the "need" to dominate form a routine part of what is accepted as [normal] male sexuality.' Lal Coveney et al. (eds), *The Sexuality Papers: Male Sexuality and the Social Control of Women*, Hutchinson, London, 1984, p. 9, cited in Tong, *Feminist Thought*, p. 110.

240 Even before the 1970s, the feminist Simone de Beauvoir was criticising the institution of marriage for oppressing women. Beauvoir claimed that 'Woman leans heavily upon man because she is not allowed to rely on herself; he will free himself in freeing her — that is to say, in giving her something to do in the world.’ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, Picador, London, 1988, p. 500. Italics in original.

Chapter Four: The “Renaissance” of the Goddess: (re)connecting with the Goddess and empowerment for women

It is the night of the full moon. Nine women stand in a circle, on a rocky hill above the city. The western sky is rosy with the setting sun; in the east the moon’s face begins to peer above the horizon. Below, electric lights wink on the ground like fallen stars. A young woman raises a steel knife and cries out, a wail echoed by the others as they begin the dance. They circle wildly around a cauldron of smoldering herbs, feeling the power rise within them until they unite in ecstasy. The priestess cries again, and all drop to the earth, exhausted, but filled with an overwhelming sense of peace. The woman pours out a cup of wine onto the earth, refills it and raises it high. “Hail, Tana, Mother of mothers!” she cries. “Awaken from your long sleep, and return to your children again!”


Introduction

Contemporary Goddess worshippers regularly attend coven gatherings throughout the western world, as in Starhawk’s description above. In a consecrated space they perform rituals, enact traditions, and call upon the Goddess for inspiration, strength and healing. Devotees believe that the Goddess is reappearing after centuries, even millennia, spent underground. She is the source and impulse of their new-old religion, which challenges everything patriarchal, remembers the glorious pre-patriarchal times, and celebrates women: their talents, their dark sides, their spirituality and their bodies.

While some refer to specific dates¹ to mark the beginning of the post-patriarchal or Goddess “Renaissance” period,² most Goddess writers would agree that the seed was

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¹ For example, an English group, known as the “End of Patriarchy Movement”, declared the ‘official beginning of the end of Patriarchy’ to have been 1 August 1993. Graham Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 1997, p. 79. In contrast, Diane Stein specifies the year 1969. Diane Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1995, p. 4. Most Goddess writers do not suggest that the patriarchy has been defeated, but that the project is only just beginning and that we are currently in a transitional period. In her book published in 1989, Marija Gimbutas, for example, claimed that “[w]e are still living under the sway of that aggressive male invasion’ and the process of reconnecting with the past is only just beginning. Marija Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989, p. xxi.

sown, for contemporary women's spirituality, in the general history of the 1960s/70s
counterculture, protest movements and, in particular, within second-wave feminism.3

The repudiation of patriarchal history, presented so far in this thesis, was inspired by the
broader feminist project of feminist history in which women claimed a voice and
agency in the past. More particularly, the rewriting of religious history from a feminist
perspective emerged from the spiritual dimension of the feminist movement. Feminist
theologians, for example, began to question the appropriateness, for women, of a male
deity in the dominant monotheistic religions.4 Some religious feminists remained in the
church and endeavoured to reform it from within. Others, such as Goddess writers,
chose the revolutionary option of (re)creating a form of spirituality in which female
deities are revered.5 According to Johanna Stuckey, the interest in the Goddess was an
evolving one that was influenced by a number of factors, such as the success of
women's consciousness-raising groups, by books about the Goddess, as well as by the
New Age movement and Jungian therapy.6 Furthermore, after a decade or so of second-
wave feminism, Stuckey suggests that some women were disillusioned by their failure
to find equality in political feminism and looked elsewhere.7 The empowerment that
they could not find in political feminism, they sought by engaging with the Goddess.8

3 See discussion in Chapter One, Section III: 'Roots, influences and development'. Regarding the
geography of the Goddess "Renaissance", writers do not explicitly outline where the Goddess is
(re)emerging. For a Goddess worshipper the Goddess is everywhere, immanent in everything, so she can
be connected with anywhere in the world. The Goddess is particularly powerful at pilgrimage sites,
particularly in Europe. From an academic perspective, the Goddess movement is a North American
development (with influence from British witchcraft), which flowed to the English-speaking world (Great
Britain and the Antipodes) through texts and via travellers and from there, with translated texts, to the
non-English speaking world. Berger highlights the importance of books and the Internet in spreading the
religion. Helen A. Berger, 'Witchcraft and Neopaganism,' in Helen A. Berger (ed.), Witchcraft and
the following for discussions of where the movement developed: Chapter One, Section III: 'Roots,
influences and development'; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism
in the Mirror of Secular Thought, Brill, Leiden, 1996, p. 87; Berger, 'Witchcraft and Neopaganism,' pp.
36—37.

4 For example, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly — see discussion in Chapter One, Section III:
'Roots, influences and development'.

5 For example, as Barbara Walker explains, '[a]ll over the modern world, a new social phenomenon is
gradually taking shape. Women, the traditional pillars of Judeo-Christian religion, are turning against this
faith. Many women prefer to gather in small grass-roots groups in each other's homes, where they
discuss recent studies of prepatriarchal Goddess worship and engage in rituals aimed at recreating some
feeling for those ancient faiths.' Barbara G. Walker, The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power,

6 Johanna H. Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality: An Introduction to Feminist Theology in Judaism,

7 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 146.

8 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 146.
While the contemporary Goddess movement emerged in the 1970s and 80s, Goddess writers stress that the Goddess and her religion have a far longer past. The Goddess, they suggest, has always been in existence, but, due to the patriarchy, as outlined in the previous chapter, was forced underground for millennia. Now, owing to contemporary practitioners (re)learning, (re)discovering and (re)writing the Old Religion, and despite the "genocide" and "holocaust" that feature in the "Fall" period, the Goddess is waking from dormancy and worshippers are (re)connecting with her and their authentic heritage. Goddess writers stress the necessity to reclaim lost knowledge and to (re)awaken the sleeping Goddess, as Diane Stein exemplifies in the following excerpt:

"the Goddess is here and now, and no longer sleeping or lost in patriarchy’s winter trance. The process of re-claiming her, re-learning, re-membering [sic] and re-visioning her skills, knowledge and rituals is a dis-covering [sic] of women as well, a healing of humanity and the earth. This re-claiming, re-visioning, dis-covering [sic] and healing are what women’s spirituality is."

A historical imaginary in which the Goddess has always been in existence is significant for the overall Goddess mythistory for proving the continuity and ancient roots of the Goddess religion. In addition, to emphasise that the Goddess’s period underground was an ‘alienation’ implies that she was forced underground due to an external force rather than owing to any deficiencies in her religion. The reawakening of the Goddess is an ongoing process. The Goddess “Renaissance” period is relatively young and far from its culmination. In the Goddess optic it is hoped that the prevalence of Goddess worship and erasure of the patriarchy will be achieved in the future.

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9 Diane Stein, for example, acknowledges that the contemporary women’s spirituality movement rose from second-wave feminism, but stipulates that this was not its beginning. Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 4.

10 Stein and Starhawk, among others, reiterate that the Goddess did not appear from nowhere, but has been asleep throughout the centuries of patriarchy and is now reawakening. Throughout Starhawk’s book, The Spiral Dance, there is an emphasis on the Goddess reawakening. See, for example: ‘[t]he Goddess is reawakening... A mode of consciousness that has been dormant for thousands of years is now coming to the fore’. Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 186. See also pp. 14, 188. An example from another publication by Starhawk is: ‘[t]he Goddess has at last stirred from sleep, and women are reawakening to our ancient power.’ Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1979, p. 262. An example from Diane Stein can be found in Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 16.

11 An emphasis is placed on worshippers finding and re-claiming knowledge and culture. Starhawk, for example, explains that ‘[t]he feminist movement, which began as a political, economic, and social struggle, is opening to a spiritual dimension. In the process, many women are discovering the old religion, reclaiming the word witch and, with it, some of our lost culture.’ Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,’ p. 262. Italics in original.


13 Gimbutas refers to the time in which the Goddess was underground or unknown in patriarchal mythistory as ‘our long alienation from our authentic European Heritage – gylanic, nonviolent, earth-centered culture.’ Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. xxi.
In its endeavour to empower women and challenge the patriarchy the Goddess mythistory of the “Renaissance” has endured numerous critiques from academe, many from within feminism. They include the accusations of essentialism and sexism, as well as questioning whether Goddess worship actually reinforces binary oppositions, and whether the empowerment that women are believed to enjoy extends from the sacred spaces of covens into daily life. Kathryn Rountree and Wendy Griffin, for instance, both argue that the Goddess religion worldview eliminates the patriarchal dualistic thinking in which women and men are positioned in hierarchical opposition to each other; such that men and their characteristics are privileged to the detriment of women and their female traits. Similarly, Johanna Stuckey, while arguing that the Goddess empowers women, their bodies, and femaleness, also explains that the category of women is expanded to the extent that it encompasses what we understand to be masculine; in other words, the dualistic categories (man/woman, masculine/feminine) are undermined in this approach. In valuing women and feminine characteristics, Goddess writers are often criticised for essentialism; feminist scholars such as Micaela di Leonardo, Jo Ann Hackett and Toril Moi question whether such a worldview is empowering for women. Graham Harvey, Stuckey and Rountree, however, argue to the contrary. A key theme of this chapter, therefore, will be the issue of empowerment. I will consider Harvey, Stuckey and Rountree’s positions and assess how empowerment manifests itself. In contrast to Rountree, Griffin and Stuckey, I will be arguing that empowerment does not result in the erasure of hierarchical binary oppositions.

1 See discussion in Appendix A.
16 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 146.
18 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 74; Stuckey, for instance, claims: ‘[t]hat Feminist Goddess Worship is about power and especially women’s empowerment is clear, and empowerment is certainly central to the concept of the Goddess. First and foremost, what the Goddess empowers is the body and femaleness.’ Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 146; Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ p. 156.
19 Goddess worship does not, therefore, fulfil Hélène Cixous’s challenge to feminists, as Rountree suggests it does. Rountree quotes Rosemarie Tong when she explains that Cixous’s challenge is to ‘write themselves out of the world men have constructed for them by putting into words the
In addition to feminist critiques, academic historians and archaeologists have criticised Goddess worshippers’ belief that the Goddess is reappearing from her exile endured underground, and the implication that her roots can be traced back to prehistoric societies.20 Scholars have responded particularly to the assertion that Goddess worship has a history that extends back to pre-patriarchal times.21 Another common and related scholarly criticism is that the mythistory of the Goddess “Renaissance” is an endeavour to re-create the pre-patriarchal “Golden Age” in the present.22 Goddess writers, however, stress that the “Golden Age” is used as an inspiration and a model, rather than as a period to be literally replicated. This chapter, therefore, will be grounded in the premise that an alternative feminist concept of the past offers an important model and source of inspiration and support for women in the present. It will develop Harvey’s observation that history and myth are empowering for women and illustrate how the Goddess writers’ particular concept of the past is crucial for the mythistory of the “Renaissance”.23

Through synthesising and elucidating the Goddess mythistory of the “Renaissance” this chapter will explore the nature of the Goddess as she has emerged in contemporary times, (re)moulded and (re)interpreted from feminist (re)discoveries predominantly in history and archaeology. It will consider what the Goddess and her religion have to offer women and men, and how worshippers connect with her. Throughout, it will illustrate the importance of a concept of history, firstly, in acting as an inspirational model, and, secondly, in connecting the past to the present and vice versa. It will illustrate how worshippers experience this mythistory from their position in the Goddess “Renaissance” through various mediums of connection, including: feminist histories, myths, pilgrimages to sacred sites, ritual, art and symbols. It will be argued


20 As the academics predominantly employ a critical apparatus in which empirical evidence is examined, the scholarly criticisms of the Goddess writers are usually concerned with inaccuracies in the Goddess narrative. See Appendix A for this approach.

21 See Appendix A.


that a concept of the past is essential to all of these engagements with the Goddess and that this particular way of engaging with the past differs from academic approaches.

This chapter will be arranged into two sections. The first is concerned with the re-emerging Goddess and the implications of her resurgence, particularly for women. The second will focus on how the resurgence has been occurring, outlining the various methods of connection and highlighting the centrality of a concept of history.

I. The Goddess of the “Renaissance”: the implications for women

The main aim of this section is to consider the characteristics of the emerging Goddess of the “Renaissance” period and, as a result, the achievements of Goddess worship for gender relations in the present and its potential for the future. The main triumphs, in this ongoing process, are claimed to be with regard to women’s empowerment: self-perception, celebration of women’s bodies, sexuality, and female roles in general. In the process of attaining these changes, it is believed that they are challenging the patriarchal worldview. Therefore, Goddess writers’ descriptions of the (re)awakened Goddess of the “Renaissance” will be explored to consider how the Goddess, and her religion, can conceivably be challenging to the patriarchy and empowering to women. Both challenges, it will be demonstrated, rely on the endeavour to dislocate the entrenched western paradigm of hierarchical binary thinking. In elucidating the Goddess writers’ understandings of the Goddess, it will become clear how the concept of an immanent deity can be perceived to disrupt patriarchal philosophy and, as a result, be empowering to women and even have positive implications for men.

Who is the re-emerging Goddess?

In contemporary Goddess worship the re-emerging Goddess is known as ‘the Great Mother, the Divine Mother, the Triple Goddess, She of Ten Thousand Names, or simply The Goddess.’


She is described as having an all-encompassing presence and as manifesting everywhere. In some ways the Goddess eludes definition because of her slippery, dreamlike and changeable quality.

25 Starhawk claims that the symbol of the Goddess ‘has a dreamlike, “slippery” quality. One aspect slips into another: She is constantly changing form and changing face. Her images do not define or pin down a set of attributes; they spark inspiration, creation, fertility of mind and spirit’. Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 9.
Goddess is not. She is not, for example, presented as simply God’s opposite. Kathryn Rountree explains that ‘[j]ust as it is unsatisfactory to position woman in relation to man as no-subject, not-self, absolute Other (not-A in relation to A), in feminist spirituality Goddess is not God’s Other, God’s feminine substitute, reversal or counterpart.’

Neither does the Goddess simply replace God in his hierarchical and transcendent position. Here, Rountree is challenging the dominant world-view in western societies; that is, the paradigm of binary oppositions. Rountree is not willing to simply invert the binary to privilege the woman side of the dichotomy, but aims to think in nonbinary, nonoppositional ways altogether, so that subjects are not viewed in relation to the “other”.

In Goddess literature the contemporary Goddess is emphasised as being immanent, in a polytheistic, pantheistic, and non-hierarchical way. In many descriptions she is also seen monotheistically. She is conceived polytheistically in the sense that she is ‘experienced in a plurality of beings, forms or manifestations’ and is known by different names, expressions and images. While she is referred to as the Goddess, for example, she is more likely to be experienced as one of the myriad of Goddesses. She is immanent and viewed pantheistically in the sense that she is described as manifesting and existing everywhere in the universe. Harvey, for example, suggests that the Goddess ‘encapsulates the single inter-connected reality in which everything exists and everything is embodied.’ Starhawk evokes the all-encompassing nature of the Goddess, as well as Her immanence in humans, when she claims that ‘we are the Goddess: We are each a part of the interpenetrating, interconnecting reality that is All.’

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27 Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 214. Rountree explains that within each binary, ‘man/woman, high/low, light/dark, active/passive, good/evil, white/black, spirit/body, sky/earth, culture/nature, self/other, positive/negative, and so on’, the first of the pair is contrasted with, and subordinates, the second. By “binary opposition” I am referring to, as Rosemarie Tong explains, the ‘coupling [of] concepts and terms in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other.’ Tong, Feminist Thought, p. 224.
28 Rountree describes Elizabeth Grosz’s assessment of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray’s suggestions of an appropriate God for feminism. Irigaray’s approach of seeking ‘an answer outside the dualistic paradigm’ seems to have influenced Rountree, but Rountree suggests that Goddess feminists go further (by ‘locating the Goddess in themselves’). Rountree implies that Irigaray’s approach is limited because ‘God is still the Other, not the self’. Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ p. 155. See Rosemarie Tong for use of the terms nonbinary and nonoppositional. Tong, Feminist Thought, p. 233.
29 This apparent contradiction, however, is downplayed in order to differentiate the Goddess from the Christian God.
30 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 75.
31 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 75. Harvey claims that ‘Goddesses are as real as the Goddess’ and suggests that the term “Goddesses” be adopted (p. 77). Italics in original.
32 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 75.
33 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 195.
A key implication of the Goddess’s immanence seen pantheistically is that she represents and is connected to everything, regardless of whether it is considered positive or negative in patriarchal thinking. As a result, nothing is supposed to be judged in a hierarchical paradigm. Kathryn Rountree, for example, explains that the Goddess ‘is a metaphor for the entire web of life, incorporating masculine and feminine and all apparent dualisms, contradictions and paradoxes.’ Likewise, Starhawk states that Witchcraft ‘dissolves dualities and sees opposites as complements.’ In this way Goddess religion challenges the hierarchical binary oppositions that place women and female attributes in opposition to men and male attributes.

The Goddess can be defined in a variety of ways, appears in many guises, and has many names from various pantheons. Regardless of the particular Goddesses worshipped, however, all are perceived ‘as different manifestations of the same forces.’ Devotees may experience or understand the Goddess(es) in different ways. Diane Stein explains that ‘[f]or some women, the Goddess is individualized and personified in one or more of her names, ages, or cultural aspects, and she is as real as milk and as close as looking within. For other women, she is only an ideal, an idea rather than a manifest Be-ing [sic], of the feminine and higher self within each woman.’ Some practitioners categorise Goddesses as one of three aspects, which, as Rountree explains, ‘correspond to three phases of women’s lives: the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone.’ In this sense, the Goddess could be seen monotheistically, as a comparison with the Christian God illustrates. For example, the Christian God includes three aspects of the divine (that is, the Trinitarian conception of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) yet is considered to be one God; the Goddess is also viewed as three aspects (Maiden, Mother and Crone) of the one deity, so could, therefore, be understood to be one Goddess.

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34 The corollary is that there would be no such concepts as positive and negative in Goddess thinking in a Goddess culture. This is clearly utopian thinking.
36 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 197. She continues: ‘[d]iversity is valued; both poles of any duality are always valued because between them flows the on-off pulse of polar energy that sustains life.’
37 Berger, A Community of Witches, p. 16.
These three aspects are also explained in terms of the lunar cycle in which the waxing, full, and waning moon represents the Maiden, Mother and Crone. Starhawk adds another two categories to the three aspects of the Goddess. She explains that '[t]he triad of the moon becomes the pentad, the five fold star of birth, initiation, love, repose, and death.' Among the three aspects and the pentad, along with other female images that the categories celebrate, are some traits that are appealing to the patriarchy and others that are particularly challenging or disregarded. The phase of Mother, for example, is acceptable to the patriarchy, while the aspect of Virgin is redefined (from sexually autonomous to chaste), and the Crone, pictured as ugly, old, and useless, is shunned.

To embrace the Crone, and other images considered as negative by the patriarchy, can be seen as an act of protest against the patriarchy. Rountree believes that '[b]y self-identifying as “witch,” feminist witches are reclaiming the Crone, re-instating her as the third aspect of the Goddess and, most importantly, identifying themselves as Goddess.' In the Goddess perspective, the Goddess is manifest in all phases and cycles of life; it follows that women are valued regardless of their age or phase. Embracing and valuing all aspects and images of the Goddess and her cycles is empowering for women in western societies, which tend to privilege youth and beauty, and devalue the elderly.

Devotees make choices as to which Goddess or aspect of the Goddess they identify with. The specific Goddess chosen for a ritual, for instance, depends on the focus of the ritual, the coveners’ preferences and needs, and the season in which it is practised. For example, as Rountree explains, 'at Winter Solstice, they [practitioners in New Zealand] invoke the Greek Hecate, the Indian Kali, and the Maori Hine-nui-te-po because they are associated with darkness and death.' In her anthropological fieldwork, Tania Luhrmann found that most women identified with the Crone. The third aspect is

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40 For example, Starhawk describes the Moon Goddess’s three aspects as follows: ‘[a]s She waxes, She is the Maiden; full, She is the Mother; as She wanes, She is the Crone. Part of the training of every initiate involves periods of meditation on the Goddess in her many aspects.’ Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 78.
41 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 79.
42 Rountree describes more images that are celebrated. For example: ‘[t]he symbol of “goddess” is seen as opening up a great range of images of the feminine: virginal maiden, enchanting seductress, nurturing mother, death-dealing crone, warrior, home-maker, protector, creator, and so on. The Goddess, feminist witches say, has a thousand faces.’ Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 214.
43 See discussion in Chapter Three, Section III.
46 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 79.
appealing, she suggests, because it does not focus on being nice and youthful. Luhrmann describes the Crone as follows:

[the dark goddess, the Crone, eats and destroys. She is the madness of the raging tiger, the mother bear’s fury, Kali child-eater and Clytemnestra manslayer, Medea, the Furies and the witches on their blasted heath. The Old Woman, the hag, initiates the death which enables life to feed on death; to recognize the need for this moment is “wisdom”. This aspect of the goddess the worshipper sees in old age, loss, pain and sorrow, as also in irrational rage, lust and all that is not “nice”. She is the angry turmoil of the winter ocean and the overwhelming, drowning destruction of deep water.]

Again, identifying with the dark Goddess or with the Crone is to identify with what is normally rejected in our culture (the ugly, the old, or the destroyer) and involves reinvesting the rejected with power and value. Contrary to Luhrmann’s findings and despite texts suggesting that Goddess worship encompasses all aspects and daily activities and emotions of life (birth, death, happiness, sadness, eating, drinking, loving, hating, making, breaking), this thesis shows that Goddess literature places greater emphasis on the parallels between, and images of, women and the Goddess that are related to procreation, mothering and nurturing than those focusing on portrayals of rage, death, aging and deterioration. Connections are commonly drawn between the Goddess’s creative life-force and that of women, as the following quote by Diane Stein exemplifies:

[the Goddess is the eternal feminine, the embodiment of female ethics and values. For most women in the movement, she is the creative life force of the universe in all of its expressions. She birthed the universe, moon, earth, and all the species of life from her body. As a birth-giving, all-nurturing mother she has much in common with every woman.]

By identifying with the Mother, women are seen to be life-givers, providers, and nurturers. Nevertheless, an immanent, all-encompassing Goddess celebrates

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49 Luhrmann, ‘The Resurgence of Romanticism,’ p. 231. Luhrmann is unsure how identifying with and relabelling the rejected can ‘help one to feel mastery over it [the emotion].’ This, she finds, ‘is the deep mystery at the heart of psychoanalysis, but to the extent that therapy works it does so through a process of this form.’ She adds that ‘[t]he dark goddess provides a kind of therapy for those coping with rejection.’
50 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 76.
51 This is not to say that Goddess writers do not address aspects of life outside of mothering and nurturing. Some writers focus on aspects of women’s lives that have been denigrated under the patriarchy, for example, menstruation. Asphodel Long, ‘The Goddess Movement in Britain Today,’ Feminist Theology, vol. 5, 1994, p. 16. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, for example, emphasise motherhood as an important embodiment of the Goddess, but also consider, for instance, the Cult of the Dead, the dark moon, menstruation and menopause. See Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother of All, Rainbow, Trondheim, 1981, pp. 19–20, 35–36, 38–42.
52 Stein, Casting the Circle, p. 4.
53 It is questionable whether identifying with the “Crone” translates in daily life into being viewed as a powerful wise woman.
everything and by doing so challenges patriarchal models of hierarchical binary thinking and empowers women to celebrate what is not valued in patriarchal societies.

The Goddess and empowerment: re-visioning the body and mind

The Goddess is praised repeatedly in Goddess literature for empowering women in all aspects of their lives. She is credited with shifting a woman’s thinking in relation to her mind, body and its cycles, phases of life, sexuality, and emotions. Goddess writers claim that the empowerment that women experience from the immanent Goddess can lead to endless possibilities in their daily lives and even has the potential to change the world. Goddess literature abounds with evocative passages that applaud and glorify the Goddess and reiterate her importance for women. Starhawk’s following stirring tribute is a prime example:

[The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be over-stressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our anger as purifying, and our power to nurture and create, but also to limit and destroy when necessary, as the very force that sustains all life. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions. We can move beyond narrow, constricting roles and become whole.]

The Goddess is presented as the inspiration, source, and the medium through which women can find power and confidence in themselves. The Goddess enables women to see all aspects of themselves in a new and positive light, in contrast to the tainted views that they have of their bodies and emotions, which are, it is believed, propagated by the patriarchy. Diane Stein explains how the act of viewing oneself as a deity transforms one’s self-perception and potential. She claims that

[Each woman who sees herself as deity finds and becomes her own role model, raising her personal self-worth immeasurably. If Goddess created the earth, moon, and universe, and if she is the earth, moon, and universe, and if women are Goddess, too – there is little an individual woman cannot accomplish. When women discover that they have personal power, have consequence, they discover that they can autonomously direct their lives as well as change and correct the problems of the world.]

54 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 9.
55 For example, as Starhawk explains, ‘[f]or women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self, and the beneficent, nurturing, liberating power within woman. The cosmos is modeled on the female body, which is sacred. All phases of life are sacred: Age is a blessing, not a curse. The Goddess does not limit women to the body; She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions. Through Her, we can know the power of our anger and aggression, as well as the power of our love.’ Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 85.
56 Stein, Casting the Circle, pp. 6–7. Italics in original.
An immanent Goddess, therefore, according to Stein, gives women the agency and power to change themselves and the world.\textsuperscript{57}

A significant achievement of Goddess spirituality is that it relocates the female body and its physiological cycles from a negative place in patriarchal thinking to one of celebration. Goddess worshippers, as Kathryn Rountree asserts, are intent on confronting fear of the female body by reclaiming it.\textsuperscript{58} According to Susan Greenwood the body is fundamental to feminist spirituality and is its source of power.\textsuperscript{59} The body is mainly celebrated for its life-generating capabilities, which reflect and embody those of the Goddess.\textsuperscript{60} The womb, for instance, is honoured as the source of creative power.\textsuperscript{61} Other parts and functions of the body are also respected. Understanding the Goddess to be immanent in every part of the body, including its biological functions and cycles, instils the body with sacredness. Starhawk, for example, exemplifies this approach when she claims that

She is the body, and the body is sacred. Womb, breast, belly, mouth, vagina, penis, bone, and blood – no part of the body is unclean, no aspect of the life processes is stained by any concept of sin. Birth, death, and decay are equally sacred parts of the cycles. Whether we are eating, sleeping, making love, or eliminating body wastes, we are manifesting the Goddess.\textsuperscript{62}

Goddess writers, such as Ruth Barrett, argue that women have been denied the opportunity to acknowledge their bodies under the patriarchy and now is the time to reclaim and celebrate them.\textsuperscript{63} Biological rhythms like the menstrual cycle are now

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} On the one hand, this is an extraordinary offer for women. On the other hand, if they refuse to embrace the challenge they are left with the burden of failure being their own fault.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ p. 153.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ruth Barrett claims: ‘[a]s women, we embody Goddess as Creatrix. Our female bodies reflect the power of the Goddess in her capacity to create and sustain life.’ Ruth Rhiannon Barrett, ‘The Power of Ritual,’ in Wendy Griffin (ed.), Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, 2000, p. 186.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Barrett, ‘The Power of Ritual,’ p. 186. Ruth Barrett, for example, also refers to the womb as ‘the cauldron of our potential and ability to manifest’ and adds that ‘[e]ven if a woman has had a hysterectomy, she has had a womb at one time, known its power, and will continue to carry within her that creative womb space.’
\item \textsuperscript{62} Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Barrett, ‘The Power of Ritual,’ p. 187. Barrett claims that ‘[w]omen don’t even realize that they are being robbed of the opportunity for profound spiritual connection through the reverent celebration of their bodies. Under patriarchy the natural cycles of womb blood are denied as unclean, polluting, and shameful, when recognized at all.’ Likewise, Shan Jayran discusses menstruation. She states that ‘[m]enstruation, in recent history named “the curse” is now being reclaimed as one of the deep magics of the female body’. Shan Jayran, ‘Darklight Philosophy: A Ritual Praxis,’ in Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey (eds), Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century, Thorsons, London, 1996, p. 208.
\end{itemize}
acknowledged after centuries of being denied in patriarchal religion and culture.\textsuperscript{64} Shan Jayran offers an interesting explanation of menstruation in which she attributes the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome to former times of suffering. In her opinion ‘our famous menstrual temper and irritability is the suppressed resentment of other times speaking out. The veil of the inner temple is torn away, and so too is the veil of pretence. Menstruation is an oracle, but she has her gentle voice if her harsh one is not ignored.’\textsuperscript{65} According to Jayran, if women experience menstruation in a negative way it is because of past patriarchal times. The implication is that in the future menstruation may not be a shameful or hidden experience.\textsuperscript{66}

Closely related to the body is the issue of sexuality. While patriarchal societies are portrayed as considering sexual activity to be dirty, evil and bestial,\textsuperscript{67} the reverse is presented in Goddess-centred societies, as Starhawk exemplifies in the following excerpt:

Goddess religion identifies sexuality as the expression of the creative life force of the universe. It is not dirty, nor is it merely “normal”; it is sacred, the manifestation of the Goddess. Fortunately, this does not mean you have to be ordained before you can do it. In feminist spirituality, a thing that is sacred can also be affectionate, joyful, pleasurable, passionate, funny, or purely animal. “All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals,” says the Goddess. Sexuality is sacred because it is a sharing of energy, in passionate surrender to the power of the Goddess, immanent in our desire. In orgasm, we share in the force that moves the stars.\textsuperscript{68}

Again there is an implication for the future; if sexual activity is approached as sacred and natural, then presumably there will not be sexual violence.

As was pointed out in Chapter Two with regards to the “Golden Age”, there is an interesting absence of discussion of lesbianism in Goddess literature about the

\textsuperscript{65} Jayran, ‘Darklight Philosophy,’ p. 208. She adds (pp. 208–209): ‘[o]bviously this owes a debt to Jung’s Shadow concept, the feared, rejected part of the Self which can be transformed into strength and wisdom by being accepted. Starhawk … named her first coven “Compost” to invoke the immense value of the rejected as that which fertilises renewal.’ Her opinion arises ‘from fifteen years’ practice as a humanistic therapist’.
\textsuperscript{66} Perhaps it follows that in a society without resentment and suffering, and in which women’s cycles are celebrated, women’s menstrual cycle would not be painful.
\textsuperscript{68} Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, pp. 195–196.
“Renaissance” period. This is surprising for several reasons. Firstly, a significant amount of attention is paid to the body, and to empowerment and celebration of the body, in Goddess literature. From there it follows that sexuality is discussed in the light of positive attitudes to sexual activity. Discussions of sexual orientation, therefore, would be expected to have appeared in Goddess literature to at least the same degree.

Secondly, in the Wiccan strand of Paganism the topic of sexual orientation – of heterosexuality – is emphasised because Wicca requires sexual polarity. Heterosexuality, for example, forms the basis of the Wiccan Great Rite. In comparison to the preoccupation with heterosexuality in Wicca the lack of sexual discussion in Goddess literature is striking. Thirdly, a stereotype of feminist witchcraft is that it encourages or explicitly promotes lesbianism. On the one hand, some scholars support this stereotype. Cynthia Eller, for instance, claims that the feminist spirituality movement in the USA is disproportionately lesbian. With regard to Dianic covens, Susan Greenwood declares that they are ‘frequently lesbian’. On the other hand, this stereotype may have developed from the fact that Dianic covens consist of women only and that many Goddess covens are women-only. It does not follow, however, that because a coven consists only of women that they are all lesbian. Moreover, if the Goddess covens are predominantly lesbian, it has not led to Goddess literature of the Goddess “Renaissance” period (or any period) emphasising lesbianism over any other types of sexual orientation.

The lack of overt theorising about the lesbian constituency of the movement is an interesting absence and one that demonstrates the self-awareness and/or maturity of the Goddess movement in appreciating diversity in sexual orientation. By not focusing on one type of sexuality, Goddess writers are not placing limitations on sexuality and thus cater for diversity. That sexual activity is liberated in the Goddess “Renaissance” period can be interpreted, therefore, as meaning that every type of sexuality is liberated (none is excluded) and neither are men excluded. Goddess writers tend to be pragmatic

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70 The Great Rite is ritual sex between the high priestess and the high priest. Puttick suggests that it is more often symbolic than actual. Puttick, ‘Goddesses and Gopis,’ pp. 116–117.


73 There are, of course, some exceptions. Sjöö and Mor, for instance, discuss sexual orientations. Their references are to bisexuality and homosexuality but they are made in regard to the past rather than to the Goddess “Renaissance” period. See Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, pp. 16–17.
in this regard. Starhawk, for instance, acknowledges that most women's lives are "bound up with men, if not sexually and emotionally, then economically."\footnote{Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, p. 95.}

Goddess writers claim that women feel empowered in the supportive atmosphere of a coven.\footnote{See Rountree, "The Politics of the Goddess," p. 151; Stein, \textit{Casting the Circle}, p. 7.} The question that some ponder, however, is whether the ritual experience transfers into daily life. Margot Adler suggests that empowerment in a consecrated coven circle may not translate into women being independent, proud and fulfilled in day-to-day life. From her research she claims that "[o]ften they remain meek and silent, allowing husbands, who are often less intelligent, to hold forth. But magically, when the candles are lit and the circle is cast, these women become, for a short while, priestesses worthy of the legends of old."\footnote{Margot Adler, \textit{Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today}, 2nd ed., Beacon Press, Boston, 1986, p. 214.} Adler contentiously adds that "[o]ne might almost say that the Craft at times acts as a "safety valve" for the establishment, providing an outlet for oppressed women but stopping short of true liberation. If so, the Craft in these cases becomes a conservative force, making real change even more difficult."\footnote{Adler, \textit{Drawing Down the Moon}, p. 214.}

In this depiction, women are empowered when they are in a safe environment and in a performance mode. Many writers would disagree entirely with Adler. Ruth Barrett, for example, as a Dianic elder priestess, maintains that the experience in the consecrated coven is the precursor to empowerment and liberation in daily life.\footnote{Barrett, 'The Power of Ritual,' pp. 187–188. Barrett explains that 'many women feel that their rituals set a standard of how life should feel outside of the ritual circle. When a woman has an experience of connection to the Divine, unconditional love, trust, empowerment, or sense of true sisterhood, however briefly, she is less likely to tolerate the lack of connection in her life outside of the ritual circle. Often these experiences empower her to make more positive choices in behavior toward herself and others. Although aspects of women's ritual can be experienced as therapeutic, its general purpose is to empower women to participate in their lives at a deeper, fuller level.' Barrett, 'The Power of Ritual,' pp. 187–188.} Diane Stein believes that the creation of energy and visions of a better world, which are created in a ritual space, are taken by the participants to the outside patriarchal world and manifested there in an effort to change the energy.\footnote{Stein, \textit{Casting the Circle}, p. 7. Stein continues (pp. 7–8): '[i]n taking the rules of harming none, sending out only what is welcome to return magnified, and manifesting/asking for responsibility, something new is brought to an order that has lost its values. That something new is very old, very whole, coming from respect for life, for others and the planet – and such new/old ideas inevitably catch on.'}

Kathryn Rountree also found many examples in her research of Goddess worshippers taking their experiences, skills and empowerment from the coven into their daily lives,
but, overall, the changes occurred on an individual level in the private sphere rather than in the public sphere as political feminist activism. Perhaps, however, it is difficult to experience empowerment in everyday life as the patriarchy still dominates in that sphere.

The ongoing practice of reclaiming women’s knowledges, bodies and their functions, cycles, and sexuality involves re-valuing what was formerly under-valued, oppressed, hidden or subordinated. These acts of re-valuing, re-defining, and re-labelling are supposed to lead to empowerment for women. An immanent Goddess requires everything to be valued, thus challenging the patriarchal paradigm of dualistic thinking. As Wendy Griffin explains,

[i]n writing the body, whether this is done through verbal or nonverbal messages, women in Goddess spirituality are deconstructing the patriarchal religious metanarrative. They transform gender identity by subverting traditional meaning and representation of what it means to be female, simultaneously creating new definitions of appropriate gendered behavior for women. This process redefines the boundaries of what is acceptable. Girls learn their menstrual blood is sacred, their sexuality belongs only to them and there is nothing wrong or dirty about it. Women learn to think about pregnancy in a way that embraces strength and doesn’t deny sexual desire. … The body thus represented [in Goddess spirituality] tells a new cultural narrative, one where Divinity is immanent, the female body is sacred, women are strong and authentically beautiful, mind and body are part of an integrated whole, sexuality is celebrated and not always linked to reproduction, and patriarchy is a temporary aberration rather than a natural condition. It is a narrative intended to heal us all, women and men, and reconnect us to a re-enchanted world.

Kathryn Rountree and Wendy Griffin both would agree that the new cultural narrative of Goddess spirituality is not an attempt to reverse the mind/body dualism, but an endeavour to erase it. The main consequence of this is empowerment for women, their sexuality, their bodies and cycles.

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81 Rountree explains that ‘in the course of fieldwork I met many women who through their involvement in feminist spirituality began to take small and large steps of self-liberation, for example, by leaving or changing relationships which were not working for them, by undertaking tasks which they had not previously felt confident to do, by dealing with eating disorders, by confronting people and situations which had previously intimidated them. In terms of generating a sense of supportive and invigorating sisterhood, feminist covens function much as feminist consciousness-raising groups functioned in the late 1960s and seventies. However the kinds of social change on which they focus as a group, in New Zealand at least, are mostly at the level of coven members’ individual lives.’ Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ pp. 150–151. This is not to say that Goddess worshippers are not politically active. Starhawk, for instance, is renowned for leading political actions.


83 As explained earlier in this section, Luhrmann acknowledges that it is a mystery how this works, but, nevertheless, suggests that it seems to be therapeutic for the rejected.

84 Griffin, ‘Crafting the Boundaries,’ pp. 84–85.

85 Rountree, for example explains that valuing the female body and its biological functions is ‘not simply to reverse the patriarchal devaluation, but because they are important to women, give women pleasure.
While infrequently mentioned, a few writers do discuss the impact of patriarchal religions on men and the importance of the Goddess to them. Starhawk, for instance, believes that, like women, men also suffer oppression in a patriarchy. She explains that the Goddess does not exclude males and allows them to find their feminine sides. Carol Christ also considers the relevance of the Goddess to men and concludes that She is beneficial for 'help[ing] bring men back in touch with their physicality, reminding them of their participation in the rhythms of life, death, and rebirth within nature.

The Goddess, Christ adds, can also 'help men learn to value their own nurturing power.' According to Starhawk, the Goddess can be just as involved with and immanent in men as she is with women. She claims that 'the Goddess is Mother, Crone, Lover, as well as Virgin; She is bound up with birth, love, and death of men as well as of women. If she is immanent in women, and in the world, then She is also immanent in men.' Diane Purkiss contends that the most positive feature of the modern Goddess religion, and one that worshippers are oblivious to, is 'their reconfiguration of masculinity.' Having an immanent Goddess has positive

and pain, preoccupy women from time to time, and are essential (yes, essential) to women’s being.’ Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ p. 154. Italics in original. Wendy Griffin claims that ‘[t]heir narrative results in an embodied theology that erases the boundary between mind and body and creates the possibility of an integrated self. In Douglas’ terms, by altering the boundaries, they change the shape of the experienced world. It is no longer Descartes saying, “I think therefore I am.” It is the Goddess saying, “As you think, so you become.” It is narrative as incantation, and it all begins with the body.’ Griffin, ‘Crafting the Boundaries,’ p. 78.

86 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 9. There is nothing original in this point of view; that men can be empowered by a critique of patriarchy is an established position in feminism.  
87 *Starhawk, The Spiral Dance*, p. 10. Rachel Pollack also includes men in her writing more than most. For example, she explains that ‘[t]his religion is the worship of a Great Goddess who can carry many names and images but who always represents the deity as a female presence: life-giving, nurturing, sometimes terrifying, but always tied to nature and to the truth of our own bodies. And not just women’s bodies. Men too have discovered spiritual reality in the image of a living all-embracing Goddess who creates the world and all life out of Her body, not just once in the long ago, but continually in the unfolding processes of existence.’ Rachel Pollack, *The Body of the Goddess: Sacred Wisdom in Myth, Landscape and Culture*, Element Books, Shaftesbury, Dorset, 1997, p. 1.  
89 Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 94.  
90 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 189. ‘For a man,’ Starhawk explains that ‘the Goddess, as well as being the universal life force, is his own, hidden, female self. She embodies all the qualities society teaches him not to recognize in himself. His first experience of Her may therefore seem somewhat stereotyped; She will be the cosmic lover, the gentle nurturer, the eternally desired Other, the Muse, all that he is not. As he becomes more whole and becomes aware of his own “female” qualities, She seems to change, to show him a new face, always holding up the mirror that shows what to him is still ungraspable. He may chase Her forever, and She will elude him, but through the attempt he will grow, until he too learns to find Her within.’ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 85. Italics in original.  
implications for men and women, particularly in regard to giving value to aspects of
themselves that were ignored or not valued under the patriarchy.

In the Goddess mythistory of the “Renaissance” the all-encompassing Goddess inspires
women to act in ways that challenge the categories of binary thinking, which position
women as subordinate to men. The Goddess thus challenges patriarchal philosophy
and, in doing so, liberates women and celebrates their characteristics and functions that
are devalued in patriarchal thinking, such as their bodies, cycles, roles, and sexuality.
While it is debatable whether empowerment occurs in daily life, it is emphasised by
Goddess writers that such empowerment occurs on a personal level.

II. (Re)discovering the Goddess and her religion

The following section will demonstrate the vast array of ways through which devotees
(re)discover and experience the Goddess, including the reading of histories,
encountering archaeology and mythology about pre-patriarchal societies, visiting sacred
landscapes, participating in rituals, viewing art, activating their genetic memory of the
Goddess, and self-identifying with the Goddess. It will become apparent that Goddess
worshippers gain knowledge about the past through their sensual experiences and
believe that they can read, speak, sing, perform and imagine the past into existence.
The underlying theme in these different modes of connection, it will be argued, is the
importance of the past. When worshippers connect with the Goddess they, on the one
hand, visit the past from the vantage point of the present. On the other hand, the past
appears to them in the present. The following section will explore the importance and
role of a notion of history for Goddess worship in the “Renaissance” period and
illustrate how in gaining access to the past through the different mediums the present is
historicised. It will also contend that the Goddess worshippers’ understanding of and
engagement with history differs from the western academic approach.

Goddess literature

A primary way of gaining knowledge about, and inspiration from, the Goddess and her
religion is through Goddess literature and women-oriented books.92 Several researchers

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have found that Pagans tend to be well-educated and bookish. Johanna Stuckey explains that Goddess worshippers 'are often serious students of ancient cultures and myths, and they read widely, attend classes, and pass on their knowledge to other women.' Feminist re-writings of history, archaeology and myth of pre-patriarchal times inform the Goddess mythistory of the “Renaissance”. This information about the pre-patriarchal past is revelatory as it provides models for a better future. Graham Harvey claims that history and myth are important for women in the present because they trigger women into re-defining themselves and their aims. Harvey explains that

\[\text{[t]he first effect of Goddess Spirituality is that women look at themselves and at female images, female role models, female activities in history and myth. Women's estimation of themselves changes: the more they notice women and Goddesses, the more they "remember a time when [they] were not slaves". Instead of inferiority, subjection, humility and docile domesticity, women can reaffirm their strength and creativity, their industry and their imagination. They can, in short, choose to see and do in their own way.}\]

The acts of reading, writing and reciting are believed to bring the past to life, to (re)create the past, and to transform the participant. Margot Adler, for instance, explains that a transformative experience occurs through the act of reading. Gloria Orenstein suggests that new histories can be created through the process of writing and/or reciting. According to Orenstein, the act of reciting, for instance, gives a story life, energy and the possibility of being realised in some way. Orenstein goes on to highlight the importance of the act of writing and suggests that

women writers of the new Eve’s (re)birth may be launching more than a mere fiction, for if, as the surrealists believed, "the imaginary tends to become real," and if, as many indigenous peoples believe, to retell the Creation story is to re-create the world, then the literature and the arts produced by feminist matristic artists over the past two decades, may actually and magically bring about amazing and surprising changes in the world. As extreme as this statement sounds, there is no reason to believe that the project of feminist

93 In trying to define Neo-Pagans, the one constant Fry found was that they are generally well-educated and 'a bookish lot'. Carrol Fry, "What God Doth the Wizard Pray To?": Neopagan Witchcraft and Fantasy Fiction," Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy, vol. 31, 1990, p. 333. See also: Graham Harvey, 'Boggarts and Books: Towards an Appreciation of Pagan Spirituality,' in Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (eds), Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000, pp. 165–167; Rountree explains that '[t]he vast literature on contemporary witchcraft is avidly read and discussed by participants in the movement.' She adds that for many, including herself, 'first contact with feminist witchcraft comes through reading books on the subject, most of which come from the US.' Rountree, Embracing the Witch and the Goddess, p. 41. See also Berger, 'Witchcraft and Neopaganism,' pp. 28, 37.
94 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 136.
95 Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth, p. 80.
97 Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 189.

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matristic artists is any less monumental than that—a project of ecological, political, social, and mythic proportions.99

Orenstein is giving extraordinary power and responsibility to artists and authors in their acts of reading, writing, reciting and creating—they have the future of the world in their hands. One only needs the will and the action of the senses to propel their vision/story/history into reality. Similarly, Melissa Raphael suggests that visualising a different pattern can lead to new possibilities.100 These comments signify the awareness that Goddess writers have of their past being a mythistory that they themselves have had agency in constructing.

Pilgrimages

An increasingly popular way to find or connect with the Goddess and pre-patriarchal times, and in the process transcend oneself and present time, is by making pilgrimages to sacred Goddess sites in places such as Crete, Malta, Anatolia, Glastonbury and Avebury.101 Carol Christ, for example, leads pilgrimages to the Greek islands of Lesbos and Crete.102 On her website she states her intentions as well as describing experiences of the Cretan tour. She explains that

[i]n traveling to Crete, we seek to connect to ancient women, to a time and place where women were at home in their bodies, honored and revered, subordinate to none. We seek knowledge of a time when women and men came together freely without specters of domination and control, self-loathing and shame, that have marred the relation of the sexes for thousands

100 Melissa Raphael, Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1996, p. 27. Raphael explains that ‘to visualize a different social patterning, whether past or future, but freed from patriarchal domination and realigned with the divine cosmic energies, is magically to conceive, gestate and give birth or consciousness to new conditions of possibility. This is the postmodern magic of (literally) making wishes come true. And it is a practice encouraged by the “reenchantment” of nature in postmodern science.’
101 Michael York explains the general purpose of a pilgrimage to be ‘the acquisition of merit’, which is most often understood ‘to consist in the movement of focused people to a revered place.’ This description of pilgrimage is referred to as “exterior pilgrimage”. York describes exterior pilgrimage as ‘a tangible and overt process’ in which ‘the idea of being physically present in a particular aura of holiness is paramount.’ According to York, ‘the entire pilgrimage undertaking approximates a rite of passage in which the aspirant seeks absolution, healing, holiness, special knowledge, or enlightenment. A pilgrim may journey to a sacred site in response to a vow, to undergo penance, or to celebrate an event associated with the location.’ York explains that religions have dual dimensions of sacred place (a topographic orientation) and sacred time (a religious calendar). External pilgrimage involves the physical, geographical and spatial dimensions. Michael York, ‘Contemporary Pagan Pilgrimages,’ in William H. Swatos Jr. and Luigi Tomasi (eds), From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2002, pp. 137–138. For further discussion of pilgrimage, see Luigi Tomasi, ‘Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism Via the Journey,’ in William H. Swatos Jr. and Luigi Tomasi (eds), From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2002, pp. 1–24.
102 She offers group packaged tours that include accommodation and air-conditioned bus travel, all, incidentally, at a substantial price. See her website, ‘Goddess Pilgrimage to Crete with Carol Christ’, Ariadne Institute, <http://www.goddessariadne.org/detail_crete.htm> (accessed 30 August 2005), for further details.
of years. We have found that the ancient stones speak. Descending into
caves we feel grounded in Mother Earth and in the sure knowledge of the
power of our female bodies. We seek to heal the wounds of patriarchy,
violece and war. We hope to participate in the creation of ecologically
balanced, peaceful cultures in which every woman and man, every creature
and every living thing is respected and revered for its unique contribution to
the web of life.  

Christ describes connecting to lost times, to ancient women and their knowledges. The
contemporary pilgrims travel back in time by being physically in a particular location.
They experience the same landscape (soil, rocks, caves, pools) that ancient women
experienced. The landscape speaks to them as it would have, for instance, to Minoan
women. Goddess worshippers believe that the ancient sites still possess the sacred
energies that enabled healing. In Malta, for example, according to an advertisement for
a Goddess tour, ‘[t]he peaceful, artistic and matrifocal people of ancient Malta left us
their temples and symbolic language and still today they feel charged with the sacred
energies of regeneration, transformation and healing.’ Goddess worshippers connect
to the Goddess, to each other, and to their Pagan heritage through being in a particular
location as well as through the rituals they perform at the sacred sites. As Rountree
explains, they perform rituals at sacred sites in an attempt ‘to forge or invoke a
connection with the original Pagan communities, to claim a longed for heritage, to
emphasize and embody a shared Pagan identity.’ They are seeking, therefore, a past
and a community that they imagine existed in the past and that they desire for the future.
Women go on pilgrimages to connect with what they have lost and to fill the gaps that
they find in their modern western societies and to heal the wounds created by the
patriarchy. Rountree observes that

\[ their desire to make such pilgrimages seems to be motivated by a huge
nostalgia for what they believe they have lost in modern industrialized
society: the “primitive,” the “natural” and a high social value placed on
women. Visiting ancient holy places is an attempt to satisfy a nostalgic
derire for solidity, simplicity, connection with the earth, and ancient spiritual
heritage, all of which are felt to have been lost within contemporary Western
societies.\]

This nostalgic longing for a pre-industrialised natural world is reminiscent of the late
eighteenth/nineteenth-century attitudes of Romanticism, which placed an emphasis on
intuition, inspiration and the rejection of rationalism. The act of pilgrimage expresses

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104 Cited in Kathryn Rountree, ‘Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body through Sacred
105 Rountree, ‘Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists,’ p. 485. Rountree adds: ‘[t]hrough their bodily presence and
ritual enactment in the place women assert the ancestral roots of their modern Paganism.’
106 Rountree, ‘Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists,’ p. 491. Aside from devotional purposes, Rountree believes
that the Goddess pilgrimage is also a ‘feminist liberatory project and protest.’ Rountree, ‘Goddess
Pilgrims as Tourists,’ p. 492.
the devotees’ desire to live intuitively and to reclaim the elements of Goddess societies that they believe have been lost under the patriarchy.

Sacred landscapes are perceived as the past visible in the present. They provide a physical context for the more abstract understandings that worshippers have of pre-patriarchal times. The sites are material reminders of past times, as well as a medium through which worshippers can connect to the past. This connection with and understanding of the past through the landscape is reminiscent of some descriptions of indigenous approaches to history.107

A drawback of the pilgrimage concerns the access that the average devotee has to participating. For many devotees Goddess pilgrimages involve trips abroad to Goddess sacred landscapes, such as the stone circle in Avebury and the palace of Knossos on Crete, or to conferences or retreats, such as the annual Goddess conference in Glastonbury. Packaged tours to Goddess sites, such as Carol Christ’s guided tour of Crete, are typically only affordable for wealthy, middle-class women.108 The Goddess conference in Glastonbury is exorbitantly priced109 and the costs only increase on arrival – attendees, for instance, purchase expensive velvet cloaks and dresses to be adequately clothed for the Goddess ball.110 In reaction to the cost of the Glastonbury conference, there is often a cheaper parallel gathering of Goddess worshippers in a neighbouring town.111 Kathryn Rountree acknowledges the cost of international pilgrimages and questions whether the expense and the experience of a privileged Goddess tour results in changes to gender relations when the attendees return home.112 She replies by explaining that ‘[p]art of the answer must include the fact that when these women are not making pilgrimages to Goddess sites, they are little different from other middle-class feminist women in so far as in their regular work and living they have the

107 Minoru Hokari’s description, for instance, of the Gurindji people’s connection to the past through significant sites is startlingly similar to Goddess writers’ descriptions of devotees connecting to ancient women. Minoru Hokari, ‘Maintaining History: The Gurindji People’s “Truthful Histories”,’ Cultural Survival Quarterly, vol. Summer, 2002, p. 26. This comparison will be discussed later in the section.
109 I attended this conference in July 2005 and found the fees and accommodation far higher than the academic conference I attended in Oxford only weeks earlier.
110 The main streets of Glastonbury overflow with New Age shops full of books, clothing, crystals and other wares.
111 Personal correspondence with anthropologist of contemporary British witchcraft Helen Cornish in Brighton, UK, 30 July 2005.
achievement of an equitable society and a sustainable world amongst their life goals.\textsuperscript{113} She also points out that not all pilgrims are wealthy and travel in luxury on packaged tours.\textsuperscript{114}

Rituals

Another way of connecting to the Goddess is through ritual, in both groups and solo situations. Ritual consists of an act and a belief and involves a tripartite structured process in which the participant is, firstly, separated from their normal mode of existence (pre-liminal stage); secondly, undergoes some kind of transformation, rebirth, or recreation (liminal stage); and, thirdly, undergoes a transition to a new existence (post-liminal stage).\textsuperscript{115} In the liminal stage stratification between people and temporal concerns disappear, and traditional knowledge is reaffirmed repeatedly, which means that this stage of ritual consists of the creation and preservation of the participants' particular religion/tradition.\textsuperscript{116} For Goddess worship, the liminal stage is important for two reasons: firstly, it allows participants to be removed from the patriarchal world of their normal existence and all of the oppression associated with it, and, secondly, it constructs a space and time for Goddess worshippers to (re)create and remember their past.

Goddess writers credit rituals with enabling women to find their true selves, to manifest different behaviour, and to transfer the new-old non-patriarchal models into daily life. Goddess writers stress that a ritual space is a comfortable, supportive and positive environment removed from the patriarchal world. Z. Budapest describes the ritual space as being free of the patriarchy and its oppressive values. She explains that ‘[s]elf-blessing rituals are a way of exorcising the patriarchal policeman, cleansing the deep mind, and filling it with positive images of the strength and beauty of women.’\textsuperscript{117} Likewise, Susan Greenwood claims that ‘[r]itual is a way of becoming “unpossessed” from patriarchy. By connecting to the Goddess through ritual, the Witch becomes empowered – she finds her own power within. But most importantly, she can become

\textsuperscript{113} Rountree, ‘Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists,’ pp. 485–486.
\textsuperscript{114} Rountree, ‘Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists,’ p. 486.
unpossessed by the alienations of patriarchal culture. In the positive and supportive ritual atmosphere women can be themselves and find the Goddess within themselves. A major aim of a ritual, according to Susan Greenwood, is for women to connect with their true selves and 'to liberate the individual’s latent power and potential. A ritual is a medium through which the past can be manifested in the present. Stein explains that '[a] ritual acts out the mythos of what should be, what could be, and what was, and manifests it as now.' In this approach the present is being historicised. The present is connected to the past and the past to the present.

Rituals, particularly ones that celebrate women’s stages in life that are often denigrated in patriarchal society, are important on a level of 'resacralizing the female body.' Rituals, it is claimed, provide women with the skills to create change, and even, as Stein proclaims, 'to change a culture and a planet.' Various techniques are used in rituals to enable women to reach another level of consciousness or trancelike states, including meditating, dancing, chanting and drumming. Susan Greenwood suggests that such shamanistic techniques are appropriate because ‘they are seen to be primordial, allowing feminist Witches to locate their spirituality at humanity’s beginnings.’ Therefore, even the techniques that are employed to connect to the Goddess are perceived to have been in existence since the beginning of time.

Furthermore, this discussion of the ways in which Goddess worshippers connect to the Goddess displays parallels with Mircea Eliade’s descriptions of religious behaviour in traditional societies. Eliade maintained that through religion traditional peoples escape from profane time and enter sacred time. Similarly, this section shows that Goddess worshippers, through various methods of connection with the Goddess, detach from the present and enter the past. They are, thus, participating in the past from the perspective of the present. For Goddess worship, the past is a constant reference point for the present and future. Eliade understands such engagement with the past as a way by which traditional people return to the time they value most – that is, the mythical primordial age. See Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask, Pantheon Books, New York, 1954.

Stein outlines how the ritual process can change the world, in the following excerpt: ‘for making ritual is also making an action into habit. By creating the precedent for Goddess-within personal power in the cast circle, women doing ritual learn to use that power in daily ways. Using power-within/consequence becomes a habit, a way of life that changes the women using it, changes the women who watch her using it, and changes the reality and consciousness around them. When Goddess-within values become a habit, and women’s self-image as Goddess becomes a habit, the world as we know it will truly have changed. When women come together to make and create these changes, a new society is born. The Goddess returns to civilization and civilization returns to a peaceful, respectful, woman-valued way of doing things. The time for this change is long overdue and only women of consequence have the awareness to make it happen.’ The empowerment that women feel in the ritual can be, it is claimed, transferred into daily life; see Section I of this chapter for further discussion.
Art and memory

Another vehicle for rediscovering the Goddess is through art. Ancient art and artefacts, for example, appear to be incredibly powerful and inspiring to Goddess worshippers, perhaps because they are viewed as tangible evidence of their past. Like sacred landscapes, art and artefacts are physical aspects of the past that are visible in the present. In addition to visiting sacred sites on her organised pilgrimages, Carol Christ also takes followers to archaeological museums that display artefacts from the Minoan civilisation; a period in prehistory in which Goddesses were supposedly revered and society has been thought to be matrifocal. To actually see physical objects from a long-lost period is presumably a moving and spiritual experience for pilgrims. It is a way whereby they can connect with and experience their glorious past. Charlene Spretnak evokes the potency of seeing a symbol that represents the Goddess; she claims that ‘[e]ven a passing glance at the symbolic forms of the Goddess reminds a woman that she is heir to a lineage of deeply grounded wisdom and inner strength and a weaver of the sacred whole.’\textsuperscript{126} The contemporary English sculptor Phillipa Bowers creates images of Goddesses, with inspiration from the past. During the creative process Bowers claims that she is being directed by her memory of the past. She declares: ‘I believe that many of the sculptures I have made were influenced by images from a memory-bank created by our ancestors long ago.’\textsuperscript{127} In her view, despite being created in the present, Bowers’ sculptures are infused with the past, because the past supposedly lives on in her and is transferred to her works. This suggestion of a genetic memory is also expressed by one of Rountree’s interviewees who explained that ‘finding women’s spirituality felt like coming home. It felt like every cell in my body was remembering sensations, feelings that must go back centuries and centuries for women.’\textsuperscript{128} Starhawk believes in a dormant memory that exists within our dreams and deepest mind and because texts and records have not survived it can only be awakened by certain ancient things and objects ‘that wake in us some intuitive sense of what was.’\textsuperscript{129} Bowers’ claim that she embodies a memory-bank could have broader implications. If the past lives on in Goddess worshippers, then it is just a matter of them activating their memory of her within them to re-awaken the Goddess.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{126} Spretnak, \textit{States of Grace}, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{128} Interviewee Sybil quoted in Rountree, \textit{Embracing the Witch and the Goddess}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{129} Starhawk, \textit{Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery}, HarperSanFrancisco, 1987, p. 32.
\end{footnotes}
Identification with the Goddess

Goddess worshippers also endeavour to connect to the Goddess and the past by self-identifying as the Goddess. If followers imagine the Goddess’s symbols and powers in themselves, for example, then they are identifying with ‘the independent female power which the symbols represent: they image themselves as strong and autonomous, as having the right to choose and direct their own lives.’ They are connecting with parts of themselves that have been denied in patriarchal culture. Furthermore, as Goddess writers redefine the witch to be the crone aspect of the Goddess, they can also be understood to be identifying with the Goddess through identifying with a witch. Identifying with early modern witches is to identify with martyrs, wise women (independent women who challenged patriarchal control and knowledge), with women whose foresisters followed the Goddess in the pre-patriarchal period, and it is also to challenge the negative image of the witch. Most importantly of all, identifying with the Goddess or a witch enables women to remember themselves.

Goddess worshippers connect to the Goddess by bringing the past into existence in the present. They essentially read it, write it, touch it, and see it into existence. Through their senses and imagination, therefore, devotees re-imagine a time when they were independent, autonomous and respected for their minds and bodies. In connecting to better past times they find empowering images of their former selves, and models of better gender arrangements, all of which, it is hoped, will lead to transformations in an individual and on a broader societal level. This approach entails gaining knowledge from sensual experiences, rather than from facts or evidence, and gives anyone willing

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132 As Rountree explains, ‘[t]he Crone symbolizes death. The witch is Christianity’s diabolized Crone, re-instating her as the third aspect of the Goddess and, most importantly, identifying themselves as Goddess.’ Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 226. Self-identifying as witches can be a political action (for example, the WITCH actions in New York in the 1970s) and/or enable a spiritual connection. Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 225. According to Rountree, ‘Feminist scholars have redefined “witch” to mean a woman – whether a sixteenth century village wise woman or a 1990s feminist – who challenges patriarchal control and claims independent knowledge and power.’ Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 222.
134 See earlier discussion in Section I. Rountree suggests, however, that unless the “new” positive, re-invented image of the witch infiltrates dominant culture, Goddess worshippers could, in fact, be propagating the negative image. She suggests that ‘they may turn out to be unwitting participants in a potentially sado-masochistic perpetuation of the most misogynistic fantasy the world has known.’ Rountree, ‘The New Witch of the West,’ p. 226.
to participate the agency to construct a vision of the future and the past. Participants, therefore, do not have to be learned to have access to the Goddess mythistory.

The interaction between the past and present occurs in two ways. Firstly, being at a particular sacred site or viewing a symbol, the Goddess worshipper is taken back into the past. Secondly, the past historicises the present. Minoru Hokari's description of the Gurindji people's engagement with history is similar to the aforementioned Goddess worshippers' relationships to history. Hokari's theory is useful, therefore, for gaining an understanding of, firstly, Goddess worshippers' philosophy, and, secondly, outsiders' perceptions. He highlights a different paradigm to the western scholarly method.136 'In the Gurindji country', Hokari explains, 'the past is not disconnected from the present and waiting for someone to find it. It is actively connected (through the hill or spirits, for example) to the present. The present (the life of Gurindji people) is likewise actively connected to the past.'137 Like the Gurindji people, Goddess worshippers experience history very differently from the expectations of western/academic historians; this, therefore, may explain why scholars dismiss or choose not to engage with the Goddess mythistory.138

With reference to Goddess worship, the scholar Juliette Wood understands their engagement with the past to be a way of reviving it in the present.139 Wood is referring to a model in which a group desires to see the resurgence of the lost paradise. Goddess writers, however, adamantly deny this claim. They stress that their engagement with the past is for inspiration and models for the future. This section, nevertheless, has illustrated that, at least in the individual act of connecting with the Goddess, devotees believe that they experience the literal past in the present.

Conclusion

In the Goddess mythistory the process of the (re)emergence of the Goddess began only a few decades ago. Why the Goddess reappeared then, and not a few decades or centuries earlier or later, is not a major concern of Goddess writers. Scholars of Pagan

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138 The Gurindji people and Goddess worshippers, of course, have many differences. Primarily, the Gurindji people have a long line of tradition and their origins extend back thousands of years. Goddess religion, in contrast, has been eclectic in constructing its past and practices, and, scholars argue that it is only decades old.
Studies point to the general counter-cultural atmosphere of the 1960s and 70s in the western world and to second-wave feminism, both of which encouraged the questioning of the status quo and, as a result, the seeking and visioning of alternative worldviews, history, religions and societies. In recent decades the Goddess movement, like the broader movement of feminism, has been challenging the hegemony of western patriarchy by rediscovering and reclaiming lost female writers, artists, and other important figures and by rewriting history and myth, and re-visioning religion and society.

This chapter has, firstly, focused on the implications for women of the reawakening Goddess of the “Renaissance” — that is, the changes her (re)appearance has enabled or encouraged women to achieve, such as the celebration of the body. In the Goddess optic, the Goddess has been empowering for women and the hope is that as her religion increasingly moves from the periphery to the centre, and as patriarchal philosophies and religions increasingly move from the centre to the periphery, more women will find empowerment. The resurgence of the Goddess, therefore, is seen as promising for the future. However, the extent to which Goddess worship challenges patriarchal philosophy is questionable, as is whether women can experience agency and power in daily life as they do in the patriarchy-free haven of a coven and/or ritual experience. Secondly, this chapter has demonstrated that the resurgence has been occurring via devotees connecting to the Goddess through various methods. It has been argued that the connection with the Goddess requires a link between the past and the present — particularly, the historicisation of the present.

The contemporary form of Goddess worship is a liberatory project and vision for the future that is in the midst of challenging, and seeking to end, the patriarchy. It is an attempt to replace the oppressive patriarchal paradigms in religion, society, history and philosophy with a Goddess-centred, women-focused, and non-dualistic worldview, by finding inspiration and models in pre-patriarchal Goddess cultures. Devotees re-


discover and connect with pre-patriarchal times and thus challenge patriarchal control through feminist re-writings of history, archaeology and mythology, as well as through experiencing landscapes, ritual and symbols. In re-writing patriarchal history, for instance, writers invert patriarchal stereotypes of women, such as the witch image. Women can then identify with and be empowered by the new images. Goddess writers challenge the patriarchal mythistory, its negative stereotypes of women, and, as a result, indict the patriarchal version of history for oppressing and victimising women. (Re)discovering their authentic heritage is perceived to liberate Goddess worshippers from the oppression of the patriarchy and patriarchal mythhistories – it questions and de-centres the dominant patriarchal history that, until recently, was the only one allowed a voice. (Re)discovering the new-old Goddess mythistory leads to changes in Goddess worshippers’ views of themselves, their religion and society. The concept of immanence plays a crucial role in enabling women to subvert patriarchal meanings, knowledges, stereotypes, and to challenge the patriarchal paradigms. (Re)claiming the Goddess and her religion from a subordinated position is inspirational for women as a model allowing them to (re)claim themselves, find self-respect, healing and empowerment.

A key intention and result of having an immanent, embodied Goddess, according to Kathryn Rountree, is to challenge and erase binary models, which inform gender relations. As hierarchical binary thinking disadvantages women in the patriarchal world, Goddess writers seek to replace it with nonbinary thinking, rather than simply inverting the dualistic, dominator model to privilege women. Kathryn Rountree, for example, claims that ‘Goddess feminists want to confound this binary logic, to abandon it and move beyond it.’143 Earlier in this chapter Rountree’s approach of challenging binary thinking was demonstrated in regard to her definition of the Goddess as not simply being God’s “other” or opposite. Another example of Goddess writers attempting to deconstruct binary oppositions is manifest in the Goddess being defined pantheistically as immanent. A Goddess in existence everywhere and in everything challenges the notion of separate categories that exist in opposition to each other.144 It

144 This approach could be perceived as reflecting the position of postmodern feminists, who question masculine ways of thinking and writing ‘because they are cast in binary oppositions.’ Tong, Feminist Thought, p. 224. According to Rosemarie Tong, Hélène Cixous finds that the dichotomies originate in the man/woman pairing, ‘in which man is associated with all that is active, cultural, light, high, or generally positive and woman with all that is passive, natural, dark, low, or generally negative. Moreover, the first term of man/woman is the term from which the second departs or deviates. Man is the
is, however, questionable whether Goddess writers do in fact replace the dominator model with nonbinary thinking or simply reject it for an inverted model that celebrates women. The descriptions throughout this chapter illustrate that the Goddess writers’ perception of a non-dualistic worldview is, in fact, women-centred. This contradiction in Goddess writers’ thinking shows that they endeavour not to reinforce hierarchical binary oppositions while simultaneously emphasising women and female characteristics, so that they are, in reality, inverting the dualism and valuing women more than men, rather than erasing the dualistic paradigm.

The Goddess artist and writer Monica Sjöö presents her readers with an apocalyptic ultimatum when she proclaims: ‘I believe that unless women rise and the Goddess returns, we will all die.’ In contrast, Orenstein, like most Goddess writers, would suggest that Sjöö’s fears should be allayed, because women are rising and the Goddess is here. She claims that

[ everywhere women have awakened themselves and the goddess, the great mother, sources of all life. They reject the view of patriarchy that says women are silent, passive and dependent to embrace and affirm the natural law of the goddess that says just the opposite. Women in women’s spirituality are increasingly taking charge – of their own lives, of their communities and of their world. Where patriarchal religions have separated and divided women, the goddess and women’s spirituality brings women together.

This current period of the “Renaissance” is an optimistic journey for Goddess worshippers; an ongoing process of gaining respect for the Goddess and women, now and into the future.

The Goddess and history allegedly exist in the present through the mediums of texts, landscapes, art, symbols and humans’ bodies and minds. Goddess religion becomes real and present to devotees when they use their knowledge, senses and imagination to bring or imagine it into existence. The past and present are constantly in a dynamic

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146 Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 16.
inter-relationship. Despite the Goddess writers' different methods,¹⁴⁷ their approach to history is closer to indigenous attitudes to the past than to western scholars' methods.¹⁴⁸ Goddess worshippers do not generally find history in scholarly texts, but through feminist re-writings, pilgrimages, rituals, memory, symbols and art – theirs is 'an alternative mode of maintaining histories.'¹⁴⁹ Goddess worshippers' different mode of experiencing history is a challenge to academic history and, as a result, highlights the 'limits of history'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Goddess writers approaches to the past vary and range from Merlin Stone, who as a lay historian is interested in written and archeological sources, to Z. Budapest, who privileges intuition as a source.
¹⁴⁸ The former emphasise the connection between the past and the present and understand the past to be illuminated in the present through landscapes, rituals, art and symbols, while the latter stress the importance of “evidence” found in written and archaeological sources.
¹⁴⁹ This apt phrase is in Hokari, 'Maintaining History,' p. 26.
Preface to Part Two: Background to the theme of ecology

Part One of this thesis (Chapters Two, Three and Four) has focused on the “Golden Age”, the “Fall” and the “Renaissance” in relation to gender. In Part Two (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) the same three chronological periods will be re-visited. On this occasion, however, the periods will be analysed in relation to ecology. This theme has been selected because, like the theme of gender, it permeates the Goddess mythistory.¹ The two themes are interlinked and constitute the twin pillars of the mythistory of Goddess worship. Just as Goddess writers view the patriarchy as the cause of women’s oppression, they also present the patriarchy as being responsible for the exploitation and destruction of the earth and nature. Similarly, in the periods in which women are represented as being respected, so too is nature revered. Such an approach is ecofeminist in perspective² and exists within the broader field of eco-philosophy,³ which includes other strands such as Deep Ecology and Social Ecology.⁴ Ecofeminism can be seen as a critical revisiting, or a subversion, of the feminist critique of the patriarchal equation of women with nature.

According to scholar and environmental activist Greta Gaard, ‘[t]he fundamental principle of ecofeminism is the interconnectedness of all life.’⁵ Similarly, the scholars

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Carolyn Merchant and Kate Rigby highlight the emphasis placed on connections between nature and women (and other oppressed groups) as the central characteristic of ecofeminism. With reference to this definition, it will become evident in the next three chapters that Goddess worship is an exemplar of ecofeminism. Gloria Orenstein claims that ‘ecofeminism recognizes that cultures which revere the Earth have thought of it as our Mother.’ Furthermore, according to Charlene Spretnak, one of several pathways to ecofeminism in the 1970s was the discovery by radical/cultural feminists, through history and archaeology, of a religion that worshipped the Goddess and, as a result, revered women and nature. Goddess worship clearly exemplifies these descriptions.

Several scholars have been careful to point out that Goddess worship is not unique in the way that it pays attention to gender and ecology. It is, according to Kate Rigby, one of many diverse ecofeminist spiritualities that emerged during the 1990s. This principle can be found in various religions and philosophies. While in practice it may be diverse, in terms of theory, as Greta Gaard points out, it ‘has been articulated largely from a white feminist viewpoint’, at least in the USA. Of the various forms of ecofeminism, Goddess worship can be situated within scholars’ definitions of the cultural ecofeminist position. Marlene Longenecker affirms that the cultural ecofeminist perspective ‘has insisted on reclaiming the connection – whether spiritual

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6 Rigby, for example, claims that ecofeminist thinking is distinguished from other eco-philosophies by ‘the substantive connections it discloses between the patriarchal domination of women (and other socially oppressed groups) and the industrial exploitation of the earth.’ Kate Rigby, ‘The Goddess Returns: Ecofeminist Reconfigurations of Gender, Nature, and the Sacred,’ in Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden (eds), Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 27. Carolyn Merchant explains that ‘Ecofeminism, with its emphasis on relations, has the potential to see connections among various forms of oppression, such as those affecting women, minorities, the colonized, animals, and nature.’ Merchant, ‘Key Concepts,’ p. 12.


10 Gaard mentions, for example, Native American thought, Hinduism, and Zen. Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures,’ p. 308. Rigby explains that women have arrived at an ecofeminist spirituality ‘from more conventional frameworks of belief, including the monotheistic “father religions” that have been so strongly criticized on feminist and ecological grounds, as well as Hinduism, Buddhism, and a variety of indigenous traditions.’ Rigby, ‘The Goddess Returns,’ p. 42. See Carol J. Adams (ed.), Ecofeminism and the Sacred, Continuum, New York, 1993, for articles on a variety of religions and their ecofeminist perspectives.

11 Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures,’ p. 295.
or biological or social – as a source of power and celebration, a sign of women’s greater sensitivity to and capacity to care for nature.’12

Unsurprisingly, Goddess worship has attracted criticism from within ecofeminism, from other eco-philosophical movements, and from other strands within feminism.13 This approach is worrying for liberal and socialist feminists who have endeavoured to downplay or sever the cultural equation between women and nature.14 Criticisms of essentialism also come from social ecofeminists, such as Carolyn Merchant. Merchant observes that ‘[t]he essentialist perception of women as closer to nature, as a result of their biological functions of reproduction, has historically been used in the service of domination to limit their social roles to childbearers, child rearers, caretakers and housekeepers.’15 The major problem with women identifying themselves as closer to nature than men and, therefore, as the ‘caretakers of nature’, Merchant points out, is that ‘it would seem that they cement their own oppression and thwart their hopes for liberation and equality.’16 According to Rigby, materialist ecofeminists accuse spiritual ecofeminists ‘of a retreat into the merely personal and, worse, of reactionary antimodernism and neo-Romantic irrationalism’.17 Likewise, the spiritual ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether accuses Goddess worship of being a ‘post-Christian Romantic construction of the “feminine”’.18

A major criticism directed at cultural and social ecofeminists, and, therefore, also at Goddess worship, comes from Deep Ecology. Deep ecologists blame human beings in

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12 Longenecker, ‘Women, Ecology,’ p. 2. Italics in original. She continues with: ‘[f]or some, the fact of women’s procreative capacity is itself the source of a biological tie with nature’s life-giving processes; for others, the fact that women have for so long been associated with nature gives us a unique opportunity to shape the relationship for the empowerment of both; for still others, the association with nature is a more metaphorical (“Mother” Nature, “mother earth”) but equally powerful source of what they see as their moral call to stewardship and protection of the environment.’

13 See Merchant, ‘Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory,’ pp. 100–105, for a discussion of the concerns of liberal, radical, and social feminisms about the relations between humans and nature.


general for the deterioration of nature – that is, for their anthropocentric domination of
nature. Deep ecologists identify firstly with nature and, therefore, endeavour to view
the world from a nature-centred perspective. They accuse ecofeminists of identifying
with humans first and of viewing the world from an anthropocentric perspective. Freya
Mathews presents the example of John Seed who demonstrates the difference between
identifying with nature from, firstly, an anthropocentric perspective, and, secondly,
from a nature-centred perspective. Seed explains that, “I am protecting the rainforest”
develops to “I am part of the rainforest protecting myself.”

In the process of elucidating the Goddess mythistory, from the perspective of an
ecological consciousness, the following three chapters will discuss Goddess writers’
representations of the type of relationships with the earth and nature that Goddess
worship has promoted, and that the patriarchy has destroyed. It will also consider the
above criticisms, the extent to which they are justified, and how Goddess writers
respond to them. It will become apparent, for example, that Goddess worship cannot
always be neatly positioned under the label cultural ecofeminism.

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Chapter Five: Goddess worship in the “Golden Age”: a society in harmony with nature

Gaia danced forth and rolled Herself into a spinning ball. She molded mountains along Her spine, valleys in the hollows of Her flesh. A rhythm of hills and stretching plains followed Her contours. From Her warm moisture She bore a flow of gentle rain that fed Her surface and brought life. Wriggling creatures spawned in tidal pools, while tiny green shoots pushed upward through Her pores. She filled oceans and ponds and set rivers flowing through deep furrows. Gaia watched Her plants and animals grow...

Unceasingly the Earth-Mother manifested gifts on Her surface and accepted the dead into Her body. In return she was revered by all mortals. Offerings to Gaia of honey and barley cake were left in a small hole in the earth before plants were gathered. Many of Her temples were built near deep chasms where yearly the mortals offered sweet cakes into Her womb. From within the darkness of Her secrets, Gaia received their gifts.


Their [women’s] knowledge of nature enabled them to tame sheep and cattle, to breed wheat and corn from grasses and weeds, to forge ceramics from mud and metal from rock, and to track the movements of moon, stars, and sun.


Introduction

In Charlene Spretnak’s description the Goddess Gaia creates the earth and all of the plants, animals, and landforms upon it and, simultaneously, becomes embodied in it. Gaia nurtures and provides for all living beings. In response humans revere her and her creations by honouring the cycles of the Goddess, the moon, and the seasons at specific times and in sacred places. In this optic the Goddess and the earth are one and inseparable. The concept of an immanent deity thus engenders the ideas of oneness and interconnectedness between the divine and the earth, and between humans (particularly women) and nature. According to Elinor Gadon, for example, ‘Ice Age peoples perceived themselves as one with the animals, not separate species; both were nurtured, like the rocks and the trees, by the life force emanating from the earth itself.’

1 Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1989, p. 5. Further illustrations of the concept of oneness in Goddess literature include the following excerpts; the first is from Riane Eisler: ‘[b]ut for our Goddess-worshipping ancestors, spirituality and nature were one. In the religion of Western partnership societies, there was no need for the artificial distinction between spirituality and nature or for the exclusion of half of humanity from spiritual power.’ Riane Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist
Furthermore, a Goddess immanent in the earth fosters the view that the earth is sacred and thus, all life is revered and interconnected. The concept of a sacred earth is supposedly imperative if humans are to respect nature and to behave towards the natural with an ecological consciousness. This progression of ideas forms the foundation of the Goddess religion worldview and is predominant in Goddess literature, particularly in relation to descriptions of pre-patriarchal people’s attitudes to nature and their surroundings. All aspects of life, spirituality, and the earth are presented as having been integrated, interconnected, inseparable, and, importantly, are represented as aspects of the one deity or life force. Such a mindset suggests that pre-patriarchal Goddess worshippers could not possibly have conceived of harming or exploiting the earth; to do so would be akin to destroying their deity, creator, mother, provider and nurturer. The Goddess writers present a version of the past in which humans interacted spiritually, thoughtfully and peacefully with other living creatures and their environment.

While there is a lack of specific scholarly analysis of the Goddess writers’ mythistory of the “Golden Age” with regard to ecology, the general scholarly critiques of cultural ecofeminism, such as essentialism and anthropocentrism (as outlined in the preface to this chapter), can be applied to the Goddess writers’ representation. Carolyn Merchant

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4 As discussed in Chapter Two, which addresses the same time period (but in relation to gender rather than ecology), there are scholars who disagree with the Goddess writers’ overall depiction of the “Golden Age”. Other scholars, such as Helen Berger, however, endeavour to search for meaning in the Goddess writers’ representations. Berger, for instance, observes that neo-Pagans ‘maintain that pre-Christian communities lived in balance with nature because they revered it, seeing it as a manifestation of the goddess.’ Berger, *A Community of Witches*, p. 22.
describes the cultural feminist understanding of prehistory as linking nature, women, fertility, and valuing women's ability to create. Kate Rigby considers the implications for female identity in the women–nature connection symbolised by the Goddess. Unlike many scholars, Rigby does not believe that linking women and nature is as limiting as is often suggested – she does not suppose, for instance, that identifying women with nature narrows their identity to their reproductive functions. Her problem with this linkage, however, is that 'in symbolizing nature as female the woman-nature link becomes somewhat reified, threatening to obliterate differences among women as well as potentially marginalizing men.' Goddess worshippers may think, Rigby suggests, that their connection with nature is innate rather than constructed. Emphasising the women–nature link also leads to the issue of anthropomorphising nature. Greta Gaard stresses that the problem with anthropomorphic projection is that it 'oblures our ability to know a different other.'

It might be argued that Merchant's perspective on the limitations of the women-nature association is simplistic, while Rigby offers a broader understanding of the Goddess writers' constructions of female identity. I would suggest that in many respects the Goddess writers cleverly avoid accusations of essentialism and uniformity. The many faces and aspects of the Goddess, for instance, cater for an enormous diversity of women and even men. Taking into account the above scholarly comments, my contribution is to offer an analysis of the mythistory by commencing with an elucidation of Goddess writers' perceptions of how pre-patriarchal humans interacted with, experienced, and understood the earth, its animals and plants, the natural landscape, and the built environment. The chapter will be based on the centrality of the premise of oneness between all living beings, the divine, and the earth in the Goddess worldview.


6 Merchant, for instance, explains that '[m]any cultural feminists celebrate an era in prehistory when nature was symbolized by pregnant female figures, trees, butterflies, and snakes and in which women were held in high esteem as bringers forth of life.' Carolyn Merchant, Earthcare: Women and the Environment, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 10. Merchant explains that 'cultural ecofeminism celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system. A vision in which nature is held in esteem as mother and goddess is a source of inspiration and empowerment for many ecofeminists.' Merchant, Earthcare, p. 11.

7 Rigby, 'The Goddess Returns,' pp. 38–39. She explains that there are different Goddess figures and aspects, many of which are not tied to reproductive functions.


This analysis will consider how the Goddess writers construct their view, how they arrive at such conceptions and what they include/exclude, emphasise/ignore in order to support their overall narrative.

The chapter will commence with a discussion of Creation stories because they illustrate the foundations of pre-patriarchal people’s supposed understandings of relationships between humans and nature. They illustrate the Goddess writers’ perceptions of the origins of the idea of oneness, interconnectedness and also of how the landscape came to be viewed through an anthropomorphic lens. The second section will focus on humans’ positive interactions with nature and focus particularly on how Goddess writers approach the Neolithic revolution, with regard to the theme of ecology. As was pointed out in Chapter Two, in scholarly and textbook history the Neolithic revolution is presented as a major historical break from the preceding Upper Palaeolithic period. This section will explore how and why Goddess writers downplay this disjuncture and present it as a smooth transition that had no detrimental affect on pre-patriarchal peoples’ respect for their environment. Thirdly, given the premise of an immanent deity embodied in the earth, a discussion of Goddess writers’ perceptions of humans’ relationships with their environment will lead to considerations of how pre-patriarchal people are believed to have worshipped and experienced the Goddess as, for example, embodied in the landscape or imaged in their architecture. A common theme in Goddess literature is the drawing of analogies between the Goddess’s body and cycles, the earth’s body and cycles, and women’s bodies and cycles. These analogies are based on the idea that the Goddess, women, and the earth share female bodily/physical characteristics. These features arise in descriptions of landscape, the built environment and festivals. Therefore, this third section will consider the mythistorical purpose of attributing female anthropomorphic characteristics to the earth and its cycles for the Goddess mythistory. In addition to drawing on writings about the landscape and festivals as evidence of close connections between humans and nature, Goddess writers also utilise pre-patriarchal art, such as Palaeolithic sculptures, Neolithic imagery and Minoan art, to support their arguments. This section will reflect on how the writers interpret this art and what kind of mythistory it supports, and the role and importance that the writers place on this source. This section will also illustrate the writers’ contention that reverence for nature is not in any way linked to a so-called primitive worldview. While they applaud nature, the descriptions of art are used to emphasise the civilised and cultured nature of these Goddess worshipping societies. As it became
evident in Chapter Two, this emphasis on culture is an underlying theme throughout the mythistory of the “Golden Age” to differentiate this period from the succeeding one. The dual emphasis on culture and nature is also significant; to revere both nature and culture illustrates non-dualistic thinking.

I. Creation stories

Creation stories are a major feature of Goddess literature. They are Goddess writers’ constructions of how they believe the earliest societies understood and explained the beginning of the world. The Goddess is typically presented as arising from chaos to create herself, the universe, and everything in it. Crucially, for the worldview of Goddess worship, the Goddess remains immanent in everything that she creates and also becomes the provider, nurturer and protector. Furthermore, the Goddess’s manifestation in the earth engenders an ecological consciousness in humans.

In *The Women’s Spirituality Book* Diane Stein credits various Goddesses with the creation of the universe. The pre-Hellenic Goddess Gaia, for instance, is portrayed as creating the sun, moon, and planet Earth, as Stein depicts it in the following: ‘Gaia the earth arose from her self, from chaos. Whirling in darkness, she became a galaxy of fiery light and created the sun and the moon, the mirror of heaven. Merging with heaven, herself in the mirror, she gave birth to seas and after cooling became the planet.’11 The Goddess Gaia features in the Goddess mythistory of the “Golden Age”, particularly in relation to ecology. Christine Downing observes that, according to the Greeks, Gaia is the ‘goddess of the beginning’, ‘the primordial mother goddess’, and that her name signifies “earth”.12 The Greek Goddess Demeter is also referred to as a creator of the universe. Stein, for example, asserts that

> Demeter created herself, the earth and moon, from the chaos of galaxies that was also her existence. She birthed birds, fish, animals and insects to inhabit the earth, her mountains, valleys, plains and seas. She created grasses and grains, herbs, fruit, nuts and seaweeds to nourish the children of her body.

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11 Diane Stein, *The Women’s Spirituality Book*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1995, p. 32. Pagans Morning Glory and Otter G’Zell recount an untypical creation story by giving “love” prominence as a force of creation. They maintain that ‘[t]he name Gaea [sic] is the Greek name for the Earth Mother Goddess, she who was created by light and by love from the primal cosmic chaos. Pierced by the arrows of Eros, Gaea [sic] gave birth to all the plants, animals, gods and goddesses, and of course the human race.’ Morning Glory and Otter G’Zell, ‘Who on Earth Is the Goddess?’, in James R. Lewis (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, SUNY Press, Albany, New York, 1996, p. 32. See also this chapter’s opening quote on the subject of Gaia by Charlene Spretnak.

The time was ever spring, and all were well-fed and satisfied, and Demeter was pleased with her work.\textsuperscript{13} 

Describing the earth as Demeter’s body is more than a metaphor; the Goddess is considered to be immanent in the earth and the provider for her creations.

In the representations of the creation of the cosmos the earth becomes the Goddess’s body and Goddess writers explain the earth’s physical features with anthropomorphic analogies. The Dianic High Priestess Morgan McFarland, for example, declares that the Goddess ‘brought forth the Earth so that the shores were Her footstool, the fertile lands Her womb, the mountains Her full breasts, and Her streaming hair the growing things’.\textsuperscript{14} Here the imagery reflects a fecund women’s body. McFarland takes the creation further and the Goddess also becomes the universe.\textsuperscript{15} The Goddess, therefore, immanent in the entire universe, nurtures, guides, and provides for mortals.

The Goddess Ishtar (also Ashtoreth and Inanna)\textsuperscript{16} is yet another figure credited with creating the universe from chaos. Like the other Goddesses, she also is what she

\textsuperscript{13} Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 40. Diane Stein admits that she invented this story of Demeter’s creations with inspiration from Charlene Spretnak’s writings and from Greek mythology. In addition to Gaia and Demeter, Stein, unlike most Goddess writers, refers to creation Goddesses from further afield than the Mediterranean or the Near East including, for example, the mermaid Goddess Yemaya, known in West Africa and South and Central America, and Spider Woman, known in North America. Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, pp. 33, 35. According to Stein, Spider Woman, for example, is credited with creating directions, and with setting the stage for her daughters to create the sun, moon, and stars. Stein explains that ‘Spider Woman arose from nothingness at the time of the dark purple light before dawn. The goddess spun a silver strand from her Spider’s body and cast it out to connect the east and west of the horizon. Then she spun another strand from north to south. By doing this, Spider Woman created the four directions, with herself as the center... The great mother sang the Creation Song from her place at the center of the web of the universe, and her daughters Ut Set and Nau Ut Set were born from the sound. The twin goddesses made the sun and the moon from seashells and colored stones on earth, and put them into the sky in their places. They created the Star People to light the night way when the moon went too far to see.’


\textsuperscript{15} The following is a ritual performed by Morgan McFarland that opened a three-day women’s spirituality conference in Boston in 1976. McFarland reflects that ‘[i]n the infinite moment before all Time began, the Goddess arose from Chaos and gave birth to Herself... before anything else had been born... not even Herself. And when She had separated the Skies from the Waters and had danced upon them, the Goddess in Her ecstasy created everything that is. Her movements made the wind, and the Element Air was born and did breathe... And the Goddess named Herself... And sparks were struck from Her dancing feet so that She shone forth as the Sun, and the stars were caught in Her hair, and comets raced about Her, and Element Fire was born... About her feet swirled the waters in tidal wave and river and streaming tide, and Element Water did flow... The Goddess spoke to Her daughters, saying, “I am the Moon to light your path and to speak to your rhythms. I am the Sun who gives you warmth in which to stretch and grow I am the Wind to blow at your call and the sparkling Air that offers joy.”’ Morgan McFarland quoted, without reference, in Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, pp. 223–224.

\textsuperscript{16} Ishtar originated in Babylon and was worshipped throughout the Near East. The Canaanite form is Ashtoreth and the Sumerian form is Inanna. Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 36. See Carl Olsen (ed.), The Book of the Goddess Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion, Crossroad, New York, 1983, for a useful overview of Goddesses from different cultures and time periods. The following

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creates, as well as being the mother and nurturer. Diane Stein, for example, explains that "[n]amed as creator of the universe and seen as the moon, the earth and the morning star, Ishtar/Ashtoreth/Inanna is a goddess of fertility and affirming sexuality, and is seen primarily in those terms. All life – plant, animal and human – are children of Ishtar’s womb, but the moon has four phases and the goddess who is life is also death and rebirth." In this example the earth is viewed as the Goddess’s womb and the lunar cycle is replicated on earth. Stein understands and imagines the earth’s seasons in terms of women’s reproductive organs and rhythms. The earth is represented as being human-like (female) in form and nature; anthropomorphic in features and cycles.

The creation stories contain imagery of the earth and female divinity as interconnected, inseparable, and as one. Goddesses are presented as being immanent in their creations. They become their creation, the earth, and it follows that the earth is revered and considered sacred. These stories are the basis for Goddess worshippers’ affirming attitudes towards nature. They illustrate the line of reasoning that supports the ideas of oneness and interconnectedness, which underlie the Goddess writers’ contention that nature was respected during the “Golden Age”.

II. Human interactions with nature

Goddess writers perceive pre-patriarchal people’s interactions with and attitudes towards, firstly, the earth, and, secondly, the creatures existing upon it in an extremely positive light. For example, Eisler argues that these early societies ‘did not see our Earth as an object for exploitation and domination.’ Eisler declares that these societies had an ‘ecological consciousness: the awareness that the Earth must be treated with reverence and respect.’ She implies that this earth-revering society was based on values that respected women and feminine values. Pre-patriarchal people’s supposed attitudes of reverence towards the earth will be illustrated in the following section and interpreted as influenced by the concept of an immanent deity, embodied in the earth.

description of creation Goddesses further reiterates the idea of Goddesses being immanent in their creations: ‘[e]ach of these creation goddesses and others – Gaia, Yemaya, Spider Woman, Ishtar and Demeter – create the earth by birth or by shaping, create all life. They are the earth and moon at once. Their symbols and legends are examples of stories worldwide and throughout time that establish a goddess as the creative force of the universe.’ Stein, *The Women’s Spirituality Book*, p. 41.

18 The Goddess’s anthropomorphic features will be explored in detail in Section III of this chapter.
In Chapter Two the contrast was outlined between the Goddess mythistory and scholarly/textbook history in their respective approaches to the historical change implied by the transition between the time periods of the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic. To recapitulate, in this thesis the two periods are incorporated under the umbrella term, the pre-patriarchal period (that is, the “Golden Age”). On the one hand, historians and archaeologists view this transition as significant and even as revolutionary. Goddess writers, on the other hand, view it in terms of continuity – a smooth transition. For the purposes of this current chapter’s focus on ecology, the Goddess writers’ provocative views offer an insight into what behaviour they deem to be harmful to the earth; presenting the Neolithic as a natural progression, with no detrimental outcomes for the environment, implies that Goddess writers do not perceive the Neolithic invention of and developments in agriculture to be destructive to the land and animals.

Humans “in tune” with animals and the environment

Goddess writers’ descriptions of pre-patriarchal people’s interactions with the land illustrate the influence of the concept of an immanent deity in engendering an attitude of reverence towards nature. Riane Eisler, for example, points out that in prehistory ‘everything was done in a sacred manner.’ Any interaction with the earth became a spiritual act. Eisler explains that “[p]lanting and harvesting fields were rites of spring and autumn celebrated in a ritual way. Baking bread from grains, molding pots out of clay, weaving cloth out of fibers, carving tools out of metals – all these ways of technologically melding culture and nature were sacred ceremonies.” The idea of an immanent deity and, therefore, of oneness influenced humans’ behaviour towards the earth and also meant that seemingly mundane activities were also spiritual. An understanding of a deity as provider and nurturer of crops supposedly affected behaviour, making it spiritual as well as practical. As Eisler contends, “[t]here was then no splintering of culture and nature, spirituality, science, and technology. Both our intuition and our reason were applied to the building of civilization, to devising better ways for us to live and work cooperatively.” This is a description of a world in which

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22 See Chapter Two, Section III. In Chapter Two, the focus on the transition from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic is outlined in relation to the impact such a representation has on women and society. Goddess writers, for instance, emphasise the peacefulness of the Neolithic and the empowerment that women enjoyed as discoverers of agriculture and other associated developments.
dualistic thinking did not exist. It highlights a major difference between this period and
the succeeding patriarchal one in which dualistic thinking is believed to have infiltrated
religion and society to the detriment of women and nature.

Elinor Gadon discusses prehistoric people's considerations of their environment with
regard to ensuring that they had sufficient resources and protection. Their reliance on
the earth for food and shelter would presumably have demanded an understanding of the
earth's seasons, cycles, and weather patterns. Such considerations influenced their use
of the land and had ramifications for where on the land they chose to reside and
construct dwellings. Gadon, for example, states that '[d]welling places were chosen
with great care, always near a reliable water supply, sometimes underneath protecting
cliffs that faced south to catch the light and heat of the winter sun'.

Prehistoric people
are represented, therefore, as considering their environment in all of their decision-
making.

As with humans' attitudes to the earth, their attitude toward animals is also represented
as respectful and, again, influenced by the concept of oneness and unity. In the
Goddess mythistory the Goddesses responsible for creating the universe gave birth to
themselves, the planet, the elements, plants and animals, and produced plentiful
environments for all living beings. Like a mother's relationship with her child, the
Creator Goddesses had intimate connections with their creations. Furthermore, their
creations had intimate connections with each other. As the Goddess created not only
the earth, but everything on it, humans' reverence for the earth extended to reverence of
animals, plants, and other features and products of the world. Starhawk powerfully
evokes the perceived connection between humans and animals in her description of a
scene from 35 000 years ago. She recounts that

[a]cross the rich tundra, teeming with animal life, small groups of hunters
followed the free-running reindeer and the thundering bison. They were
armed with only the most primitive of weapons, but some among the clans
were gifted, could "call" the herds to a cliffside or a pit, where a few beasts,
in willing sacrifice, would let themselves be trapped.

Thus, the hunters had no need for highly-developed weapons or violence, nor a need to
dominate their food source. 'These gifted shamans [the hunters]', Starhawk adds,

26 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 4.
27 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, Harper & Row,
San Francisco, 1979, p. 3.
'could attune themselves to the spirits of the herds'. They communicated their need for food psychically and the animals responded because that was simply the rhythm and cycle of life; the animals and humans were psychically "in tune" with each other. Humans' search for food, therefore, occurred in accordance with the seasonal availability of plants and animals. Pre-patriarchal people's decisions regarding the location of their dwellings also considered the availability of animals for food. According to Elinor Gadon, for example, dwelling sites were chosen 'sometimes overlooking shallows and fords in the rivers where migrating animals such as reindeer might cross' or at least with a good view from which to observe animals.

Goddess writers represent pre-patriarchal people as being, on the one hand, gifted and psychic in their approach to hunting food, and, on the other hand, as strategic, for example, in choosing locations with vantage points to observe their food source. As a strategic approach can be understood as a form of rational thinking and as intuition is portrayed as irrational thinking, the employment of both rational and irrational thinking is another example of non-dualistic thinking. Goddess writers also stress the lack of violence involved in pre-patriarchal hunting techniques. The implication is that pre-patriarchal people were advanced and civilised in their approaches. This emphasis sets up a contrast to the "Fall" that was to come in the succeeding period of patriarchal rule. Goddess writers do not view the Neolithic revolution as deterioration into practices that harmed the environment. On the contrary, differences between hunter/gatherer and agricultural societies are presented as a transition, or evolution, rather than as a major break in history.

The transition from Upper Palaeolithic to Neolithic ways of life

In Goddess literature the period in which the Goddess and nature were revered is most often referred to as pre-patriarchal, pre-Indo-European, prehistory or, in the case of Marija Gimbutas, as Old Europe. This era incorporates the Upper Palaeolithic and

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28 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 3.
29 The descriptions suggest that hunters in the "Golden Age" did kill animals to eat (that is, it was not a culture of vegetarians). The Goddess writers' depiction of hunting, though, is that it was performed in the most careful, considered way so as to harm and distress the potential food-sources as little as possible.
30 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 4.
31 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 4.
Neolithic periods, and in some cases the Bronze Age. When acknowledged by Goddess writers, the transition from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic stage is presented as a smooth and peaceful development in which any changes are attributed to the evolution from a hunter/gatherer socio-cultural system to an agricultural system. These changes, however, are not presented as revolutionary or as having any detrimental affect on the overarching features of a Goddess-worshipping society, such as nature-worship, peace, and egalitarianism. While historical change is implied in the two terms, this section will argue that Goddess writers integrate this juncture in history into their mythistory, not as a marked break, but as a smooth transition. It will consider criticisms of this view and Goddess writers' responses, as well as the political implications of such a stance.

Goddess writers do acknowledge differences in approaches towards nature between hunter/gatherer and farming societies. Hunter/gatherer societies, for example, are described as being nomadic and as moving in groups in response to the availability of food, water, and shelter. As Carol Christ explains, '[t]hese people [of the late Upper Paleolithic] were deeply in tune with nature, moving from place to place as the seasons shifted, in search not only of the great beasts, but also of water to drink and wild greens, fruits, nuts, seeds, vegetables, insects, reptiles, fish, and small animals to eat.' Interestingly, Christ claims that women were the primary providers of food, gathering 'up to 80 percent of the food of the clan in the form of edible plants.' Christ adds that women 'probably also "hunted" small animals, such as snails, lizards, turtles, fish, and birds.'

The change to agricultural society is not portrayed in any way as Neolithic people losing their ability to intuit nature and live in harmony with it; they are simply presented as gradually learning from their observations of nature and, as a result, interacting differently with it. According to Elinor Gadon, women gradually discovered agriculture. In their task of food gathering, Gadon suggests that 'they must have

36 Gadon also says that '[w]omen are now generally credited by prehistorians with the discovery of agriculture.' Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 22. Carol Christ asserts that '[a]s anthropologist
observed how the grasses reseeded themselves. Experimenting with the natural seeds, women developed and cultivated grains that were to become the chief foods.\footnote{Ruby Rohrlich has noted, most anthropologists will “concede” that women probably were the inventors of agriculture. Carol Christ, \textit{Rebirth of the Goddess}, p. 53. She adds that “[a]nthropological research and contemporary experience in much of the world show the important role of women in small-scale agriculture and stock breeding.”} After seeding and cultivating grains, Gadon adds that the women ‘learned to husk, to grind, and to bake wheat and barley into bread.’\footnote{Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 22. Carol Christ also claims that women would have noticed the connection between seeds and plants. She contends that “[b]ecause women were the primary food gatherers and food preparers in Paleolithic societies, they are the most likely ones to have noticed the relation between dropped seeds and the green plants that come up. Because women had responsibility for the care of human babies, they may also have been the ones to feed and care for the abandoned young of wild animals and thus the first to domesticate animals.” Christ, \textit{Rebirth of the Goddess}, p. 53.} Similarly, Starhawk links women’s discovery of agriculture to them being ‘[d]eeply attuned to plant and animal life’\footnote{Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 22.}

Their interaction with nature changed from hunting to taming, from respectfully taking nature’s provisions, to interacting with it to increase the production of certain resources. Gadon explains that ‘[b]efore, men and women had been “part of nature, at her mercy, it is true, but also securely in her shelter.” Now they had to actively intervene with nature to co-create their food supply.’\footnote{Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 21. The internal quotation is from Sibylle von Cles-Reden, \textit{The Realm of the Great Goddess: The Story of Megalith Builders}, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1962, p. 4.} Similarly, Starhawk describes the change in interactions with nature. She points out that ‘they tamed where once they had hunted, and they bred sheep, goats, cows, and pigs from their wild cousins. Seeds were no longer only gathered; they were planted, to grow where they were set.’\footnote{Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, p. 4.} The change is presented as being due to humans observing and learning from nature, and expanding its abilities and uses in a positive way; it has absolutely no detrimental affect on people’s reverence for nature. It is apparent that women are predominant in the descriptions, suggesting that they do not lose any autonomy with the new system, but, in fact, created it and evolved with it and continued to hold key positions. The writers acknowledge a change in behaviour towards nature and interactions with the earth, but are careful to present it as a natural and gradual development, as evolution in women’s work and as evolution in approaches to animals and the environment.

This perceived gradual change from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic does have some ramifications for the way that humans are portrayed as interacting with the
environment and for their perceptions of the earth and the Goddess. While both societal arrangements are presented as believing in a Goddess, the change in attitude to nature is described as being followed by a corresponding change in the way that the Goddess is imaged and represented. The Goddess evolves from being perceived as the Great Mother, Mother Earth, Lady of the Animals or Lady of Wild Things, to being known as the Great Goddess, Lady of the Plants or Corn Mother.42 Elinor Gadon explains that '[a] strong link was forged connecting women as the cultivators of grain, to grain as the bounty of the Goddess, and to bread as the staff of life.'43 Hence, the Goddess became a grain Goddess and was worshipped in the hope that she would ensure a bountiful harvest. The Goddess, therefore, is not just the provider of wild resources in nature, but also of domesticated plants. Neolithic people's interactions with nature continue to be presented as being in tune with the natural world and their actions as being stimulated by signs in nature. For example, as Starhawk explains, 'the cycles of moon and sun marked the times for sowing and reaping and letting out to pasture.'44 They worked with nature, not against it or to exploit it. Any changes between the two ways of life are presented as positive. Kathy Jones, for example, credits the “Tuatha de Danaan” (people of the Goddess Dana) with bringing ‘the culmination of Neolithic evolution, building great outdoor temples of standing stones’.45

The idea of a peaceful Neolithic period is crucial for the Goddess mythistory of a sustainable ecological society in which animals, plants and the earth were respected.46 In this optic it would simply be incongruous for a society to worship a Goddess and to exploit the earth for resources. Furthermore, Goddess writers are able to support their representation by utilising the wealth of Goddess imagery in the Neolithic period. The cyclical theme of birth/life/death, for instance, is presented as being prevalent in agricultural societies that live in tune with the cycles of the seasons, moon, and sun. Any changes, therefore, in the transition from Upper Palaeolithic to Neolithic are viewed as enhancing the society. Goddess societies are represented as evolving from one in which people were in tune with wild, untamed nature, to one in which they were in tune with domesticated nature. Any advances in technologies or knowledge were

42 Starhawk, for example, writes that ‘The Lady of the Wild Things became the Barley Mother’. Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 4.
43 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 22.
44 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 4.
46 See Chapter Two for a discussion of the “Golden Age” as being a peaceful period.
used in positive, peaceful, and civilised ways. The Goddess writers’ representation of the Neolithic reveals their position within Green politics. The mythistory of the “Golden Age” is certainly human-centred and the fact that Goddess writers do not classify the agricultural revolution as a “fall” makes them susceptible to further criticism from the Deep Green strand of eco-philosophy, which would view agricultural practice as damaging to the environment.

III. The anthropomorphic features of an immanent Goddess

In Goddess literature the deity is often imagined with anthropomorphic features. As the Goddess is believed to have been immanent in the earth, her features are visible in the landscape and are depicted as having female human characteristics. Throughout the literature comparisons are made between the bodies and cycles of the Goddess, of women and of the universe. The following section will illustrate the purposes of these analogies by looking at how they are used in descriptions of the landscape, the built environment, and the festivals and rituals that honour the fertility cycles. It will demonstrate the importance of the anthropomorphic imagery and the interests that this imagery serves. For instance, a particular female body is inscribed on the Goddess – an image with breasts and a womb that is certainly fertile and maternal.

Understanding the deity in the natural landscape: her body and spirit

According to Goddess writers, pre-patriarchal peoples visualised the Goddess in their physical surroundings. Goddess writers describe the Goddess’s physical features anthropomorphically as the physical forms and features on and within the earth. Stein, for example, evocatively describes the Goddess’s body. She reflects that ‘Her deep breasts are mountains and her watery dark openings are oceans, her skin the soil from which all plants and nourishment grow. Her interior is birth, death and the underworld of rebirth, the place where crystals and volcanoes form, where life begins and ends.’

Caves are frequently mentioned in Goddess literature as representing the Goddess’s womb during the period of the “Golden Age”. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor declare

47 Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 32.
48 The historian G. Rachel Levy, according to Carol Christ, suggests ‘that Paleolithic people understood the cave to be the womb of the Creatress, the Great Mother, the Earth. Rituals performed in her center would have reflected people’s desire to participate in the creativity of the Mother of the Living and the Dead and to align themselves with the power of the great beasts that emerged from her womb.’ G. Rachel Levy, Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, as paraphrased in Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 51. Another example is the following quotation from Charlene
that '[t]he Cave, as the Womb of the Earth Goddess, was considered by the ancients to be the repository of mystic influences.'\textsuperscript{50} Christ draws connections between the belief that the cave is the Goddess's womb and the fact that Palaeolithic art was produced in caves and included images of Goddesses.\textsuperscript{51} She speculates that Palaeolithic people were drawn to caves, through their rituals, in search 'for her, Mother of Mysteries, Great Womb of Life and Death'.\textsuperscript{52} Likewise, Sjöö and Mor remark that people went to caves 'to commune with the deepest, most awesome powers.'\textsuperscript{53} Goddess writers' assertion, therefore, is that caves were sacred and the implication is that women's wombs, reproductive organs and bodies were also considered to be sacred.

Some prehistoric locations associated with the Goddess are presented as being particularly magical and spiritual. The area of today's Glastonbury is one such example. Glastonbury is known for its striking landmark, the Glastonbury Tor,\textsuperscript{54} which is visible from the rural surrounds and, importantly, is believed to stand on two Ley lines,\textsuperscript{55} making it a topophilic site. Topophilia is 'the belief that certain locations are inherently powerful and exude a heightened sense of place.'\textsuperscript{56} Delphi in Greece is

\textsuperscript{50} Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{51} Christ, \textit{Rebirth of the Goddess}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{52} Christ, \textit{Rebirth of the Goddess}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{53} Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{54} The Glastonbury area (the Isle of Avalon) is also believed to embody the Goddess. According to Brian, a Priest of Avalon, the Glastonbury Tor represents the Goddess's left breast. In a second representation, the area represents a swan and the actual Tor represents the swan's wing. Personal notes from a Goddess tour/pilgrimage of the Glastonbury Tor led by Brian, Priest of Avalon, 24 July 2005.
\textsuperscript{55} Polly Lloyd, \textit{About Glastonbury}, Bossiney Books, Launceston, Cornwall, 1992, p. 45. Lloyd describes ley lines as 'invisible lines linking prominent features at certain points; on a practical level they could be used as navigational aids, guiding the traveller from point to point across great distances, but on a more mystic level they are believed by some to represent a geometry whose meaning has been forgotten, or to indicate places where metaphysical forces are strongest.' Goddess worshippers understand the term "ley lines" as explained by Lloyd in her second definition.
another sacred site in Goddess worship as it was believed to be the birthplace of Gaia and the world.57

Understanding the deity in the built environment

In addition to visualising and/or sensing the Goddess in natural surroundings, Goddess writers suggest that pre-patriarchal people’s awareness of the Goddess’s embodiment in the landscape influenced design to ensure that the built environment was constructed in harmony with the natural embodiments of the Goddess. Architectural historian Vincent Scully has written about the sacred nature of the landscape, and, more particularly, the alignment of the Minoan palaces in the Cretan landscape, and his work has been influential in Goddess literature.58 According to Rachel Pollack, Scully argues that ‘[t]he Cretans sited each of the large buildings on a (roughly) north-south axis facing a conical hill and beyond that a horned mountain containing a cave used as a religious sanctuary.59 The earth’s fertile body (the conical hill), therefore, is in alignment with the palace, a valley, and a double-peaked mountain. The latter is believed to represent bulls’ horns, a symbol of the Goddess’s power.60 In more detail, the architect Mimi Lobell explains that ‘[t]he proper siting of the palace accentuated the meaning of the landscape as the body of the Goddess. The valley was her encircling arms; the conical hill, her breast or nurturing function; the horned mountain, her “lap” or cleft vulva, the Earth’s active power; and the cave sanctuary, her birth-giving womb.61 The positioning of the built environment in relation to the natural embodiments of the Goddess, therefore, was considered and precise, and presumably deemed to be of consequence.

57 Riane Eisler points out that ‘[t]he well-known oracular shrine at Delphi also stood on a site originally identified with the worship of the Goddess.’ Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987, p. 70. In Goddess literature, the oracular shrine at Delphi is guarded by a serpent and priestess; in contrast to conventional Greek mythology, Apollo is considered a latecomer to Delphi. See Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 28. Charlene Spretnak explains that ‘Gaia’s oracular function appears in records of her worship at Delphi, Athens, and Aegae. She was the earliest possessor of the Delphic oracle, before Poseidon, Dionysos, or Apollo.’ Spretnak, Lost Goddesses of Early Greece, p. 45.


60 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 91.

Not only was alignment important, but Goddess writers such as Rachel Pollack and Kathy Jones suggest that actual buildings were constructed in the shape of the Goddess’s body. According to Pollack, for example, the Goddess temples on Malta had the outline of a woman’s body ‘with rounded chambers, like breasts and hips, with a smaller chamber at the back for a head’.62 With reference to the British Stone Age landscape, Priestess of Avalon Kathy Jones claims that ‘[i]n prehistoric times ceremonial buildings were constructed to reflect the shape of the Mother Goddess’s body, particularly Her Womb and pregnant Belly.’63 Jones explains that ‘[r]ound mounds were shaped like the pregnant Womb of the Great Mother. Long barrows were shaped like Her body. Inside both narrow vaginal passageways lead to one or several small dark womb-like chambers.’64 The implications of having a building designed in the shape of the Goddess’s body are considered by Rachel Pollack when she reflects that entering such a sanctuary would have felt like ‘entering a divine body.’65 Designing the built environment in the image of a Goddess appears to have facilitated worshippers’ connections with the Goddess in a spatial, physical, three-dimensional way. This experience of the built environment signifies a stark contrast with that of the relationship with a transcendent deity that inhabits an imagined location removed from the earth.

The monuments of prehistoric Avebury, in south-western England, are an interesting case study for considering interpretations of the built environment. The mounds and avenues appear over a vast area and, supposedly, are positioned in alignment. Neolithic Avebury boasts one of the largest henges in Britain (the Avebury Circle c2600–2100BC), a chambered tomb (the West Kennet Long Barrow c3700–3500BC), standing stones (the West Kennet Avenue c2300–2000BC), and the largest human-made mound in Europe (Silbury Hill 2700BC).66 Elinor Gadon claims that Avebury was the most important centre in Stone Age Britain and was a site of Goddess worship.67 Silbury Hill is understood to represent the Goddess’s pregnant womb. The Stone Age landscape at Avebury is interpreted as ‘a huge Serpent lying in the landscape’, a bull’s head with

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64 Jones, The Ancient British Goddess, p. 120.
67 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 69.
horns, or as the Goddess’s reproductive organs. Not only, therefore, is the Goddess imagined anthropomorphically, but also in the form of animals’ bodies and female anatomy. Kathy Jones details the latter image in the following excerpt:

West Kennet and Beckhampton Avenues are Her Fallopian tubes, which come together in Her Womb/Cervix at the great central henge of Avebury, with its two internal rings of stones. This is a representation of the reproductive organs of the Great Mother. Silbury Hill which lies to the south, midway between the Sanctuary and Knoll Down, is the Goddess’s visibly pregnant belly.

The Mother’s fertile conceptual energies would be aroused and celebrated at appropriate times of the year, such as Beltane. According to Michael Dames, these generative organs lie within the body of a huge landscape Goddess, whose outline is marked by the positions of long barrows, stone circles and hill tops.

In Avebury the Goddess is not static or passive in a hill or cave. Her body changes with the seasons, emphasising the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

While the tall standing stones, for example in Avebury, were an integral part in the broader topographical picture of the landscape, they were also supposed to be powerful in their own right. Some of the individual monoliths, for example, were perceived as embodying particular Goddesses, ancestors and animals. Kathy Jones maintains that the Neolithic stone circles in the British Isles were inspired by the Goddess Dana and built by the “Tuatha de Danaan” (people of the Goddess Dana). According to Jones, the standing stones ‘connect the Earth and the underground Waters to the Air and the Fires of the Sun, Moon and Stars.’ Starhawk depicts how Neolithic standing stones held power and energy, were the custodians of unknown and mysterious knowledge, as well as being markers of time. She evocatively explains how

[i]n the lands once covered with ice, a new power was discovered, a force that runs like springs of water through the earth Herself. Barefoot priestesses trace out “ley” lines on the new grass. It was found that certain stones

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68 Jones, *The Ancient British Goddess*, p. 120.
69 The criticism of anthropocentrism is, therefore, not entirely justified.
71 Kathy Jones relies on Michael Dames’s theories to interpret the prehistoric landscape in the British Isles. Other Goddess writers, such as Elinor Gadon, Monica Sjö and Barbara Mor also refer to Dames’s theories. See, for instance, Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 70; Sjö and Mor, *The Ancient Religion*, p. 26. Michael Dames is a British artist and graduate in geography and archaeology. In Dames, *The Silbury Treasure*, Dames focuses entirely on Silbury Hill in an endeavour to unravel its material make-up and meaning. He claims that Silbury Hill can be “read” to gain insight into the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of the prehistoric community that surrounded it. Dames, *The Silbury Treasure*, p. 11.
increase the flow of power. They were set at the proper points in great marching rows and circles that mark the cycles of time. The year became a great wheel divided into eight parts: the solstices and equinoxes and the cross-quarter days between, when great feasts were held and fires lit. With each ritual, with each ray of the sun and beam of the moon that struck the stones at the times of power, the force increased. They became great reservoirs of subtle energy, gateways between the worlds of the seen and the unseen. Within the circles, beside the menhirs and dolmens and passage graves, priestesses could probe the secrets of time, and the hidden structure of the cosmos. Mathematics, astronomy, poetry, music, medicine, and the understanding of the workings of the human mind developed side by side with the lore of the deeper mysteries.

According to Goddess writers, the stones were intentionally positioned to receive certain amounts of sunlight at particular times of the year. In regard to the Avebury henge, for example, Kathy Jones explains that 'Terence Meaden has shown experimentally that rays of light from the rising sun on a neolithic Beltane morning would have penetrated a specially positioned vulvic stone in the southern inner ring.'

The standing stones were, Jones contends, placed in particular alignment with the sun, stars and moon. She claims, for example, that 'at Avebury from c.4,000–1,200 BCE the constellation of Taurus led by the Pleiades, rose due west of the central henge on the evening of the spring equinox. In early Zodiacs Taurus is the first sign of the year. The appearance of the bright yellow Alcyone of the Pleiades heralded the beginning of springtime.' Such accuracy in design suggests that the architects of the stone circles had intimate knowledge of the universe’s cycles and knowledge of geometry and astronomy in order to position the stones so precisely. Aside from being considered mystical, spiritual and powerful, as well as symbolising the Goddess and her epiphanies, the standing stones are presented in Goddess literature as having an important and practical role in marking the seasons and time and as connections between the earth and the solar system.

Another example of humans altering the physical landscape is at Glastonbury. An oft-cited belief about the Glastonbury Tor is that prehistoric people contoured the terraces on the hill in a labyrinthine design. The labyrinthine pattern is significant because of

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74 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 4.
76 Jones, *The Ancient British Goddess*, p. 117.
77 Lloyd mentions Geoffrey Russell’s “maze theory” about the terraces on the Tor, in which he ‘concluded that they [the terraces] had been cut into the hillside by prehistoric man to form a maze.’ Geoffrey Russell paraphrased, without reference, in Lloyd, *About Glastonbury*, p. 49. Of the various theories, the one most applicable to Goddess worship mentioned by Geoffrey Ashe is that ‘[i]ts slopes are terraced in a formation that can be viewed as making the Cretan pattern in three dimensions, moulded to the shape of the hill.’ Geoffrey Ashe, *Labyrinths and Mazes*, Wessex Books, np, 2003, p. 18; Personal notes from a Goddess tour/pilgrimage – “Walking the Labyrinth” – of the Glastonbury Tor led by Brian, Priest of Avalon, 24 July 2005.
its association with the Goddess culture of Minoan Crete, in which the labyrinth is believed to be a symbol of the life journey of birth/death/rebirth and 'the body of the Earth Mother'. In the previous examples the built environment was modelled to represent the Goddess; in this example the natural environment is altered to represent a symbol of the Goddess. It is significant that connections are drawn between Glastonbury and Crete and even, in some examples, with the Hopi Indians. This reference to far-flung locations reveals the Goddess writers' attempt to be global, or at least pan-European. It also illustrates their practice of being eclectic regarding their use of sources to support their representation. They often, for example, assume that symbols that existed in different times and locations had the same meanings.

Rachel Pollack claims that 'the sculpting of the Glastonbury hillside implies seeing a divine power within the land and sensing the need for human action to bring that hidden body directly into reality.' In a sense, the sculpting allows the Goddess to be released from underground. The labyrinthine pattern on the Glastonbury Tor has seven levels of terracing, which, according to Kathy Jones, is the pattern of the Cretan Labyrinth of the Goddess that was sacred in the ancient world. Humans created labyrinthine designs in other parts of the prehistoric world and the labyrinthine symbol was carved or engraved on stones, ceramic vessels, and seals. Elinor Gadon suggests that the palace of Knossos, for example, had a labyrinthine complexity. She explains that '[t]he ritual center was deep within the palace; the discovery of the labrys emblazoned on the walls gave credibility to the historical origins of the myth. This was the secret place out of which the Greeks created the mythical Labyrinth.' In his book, Labyrinths and Mazes, Geoffrey Ashe describes a labyrinth to be unicursal, that is, unlike a maze, it has one path. He explains that '[s]tarting inwards from an entry point in the boundary, the path

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78 J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, Thames & Hudson, London, 1978, p. 93. The labyrinth has various meanings. For the purposes of Goddess worship it is used as a symbol of the Goddess and of the earth's womb. In an extensive description of the symbol Cooper includes various meanings; the ones most relevant to Goddess worship include connections with 'the symbolism of the coiled snake.'
79 See, for example, Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 18.
81 Jones, The Ancient British Goddess, pp. 90–91; See also Lloyd, About Glastonbury, p. 50.
82 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 106. Italics in original. Geoffrey Ashe explains that '[t]he word "labyrinth" made its way into European languages from ancient Crete, where there was undoubtedly something called so, though it is not entirely clear what it was. The word may or may not be derived from labrys, meaning a kind of sacred axe, whatever the logic of the connection.' Ashe, Labyrinths and Mazes, p. 4. Unlike Ashe, Goddess writers claim a definite connection between the words labyrinth and labrys. See Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 25.
83 Ashe, Labyrinths and Mazes, pp. 2–3.
may twist and turn and double back, but it leads, normally, to a centre.\textsuperscript{84} The labyrinthine path to its centre is analogous to the pathway from the outside world to the inner world of the earth's womb, which is also analogous to the vaginal passage to a woman's womb. Here, again, the connection between humanity, the earth, and the divine is striking.

Elinor Gadon remarks that the labyrinth symbolises 'the journey into the other world and the return, a death to one state and rebirth into another.'\textsuperscript{85} Similarly, Sjöö and Mor explain that the labyrinth is situated at cave entrances and is the place of emergence (birth/rebirth) from the earth.\textsuperscript{86} Goddess worshippers are portrayed as having journeyed through the spiral or labyrinth. As Sjöö and Mor point out, 'the Great Mother was the Body of Life; She was the Way that must be travelled to realize Life. \textit{It was in the Spiral, or Labyrinth, that the Way had to be danced or walked} in all the rites of the Mother throughout the ages, and the world. The Way is always connected with a cave/womb.'\textsuperscript{87} Starhawk describes this rhythm of life, death, and rebirth as the "Spiral Dance".\textsuperscript{88}

This theme of life, death and rebirth occurs repeatedly in Goddess literature, particularly in relation to living beings returning to the womb to die and to be reborn. For instance, Gadon explains that

\begin{quote}
[j]ust as the plants withered, died, and fell into the earth, so did animals. Humans also returned to the earth's womb at death, to be reborn again like the plants in the great seasonal round. The dead were buried in the fetal position with their arms across their chests, their bodies marked with red ochre, the pigmented earth, symbolic of life-giving blood.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

Carol Christ takes this practice of burying the dead in the foetal position all the way back, extraordinarily, to the first evidence of religious ritual, to that of the Neanderthal

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[84]{Ashe, \textit{Labyrinths and Mazes}, p. 2.}
\footnotetext[85]{Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 106.}
\footnotetext[86]{Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 18.}
\footnotetext[87]{Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 18. Italics in original.}
\footnotetext[88]{Starhawk refers to the "Spiral Dance" as the 'pulsating rhythm that infuses all life, the dance of the double spiral, of whirling into being, and whirling out again.' She adds that '[t]he spiral dance was seen also in the sky: in the moon, who monthly dies and is reborn; in the sun, whose waxing light brings summer's warmth and whose waning brings the chill of winter.' Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, p. 3.}
\footnotetext[89]{Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 6. Kathy Jones outlines how the death aspect of the life cycle was enacted in the built environment. She claims that '[t]he Death Mother is represented in Brigit's Isles in the shape of the ritual mounds known as long barrows, which date from circa 4,250 BCE. She was the Tomb in which bodies and bones were buried at death, and the Womb from which all souls would one day be reborn. The long barrows were huge, long mounds of earth, shaped like Her body, often covered in gleaming white chalk or in stones with sparkling quartz crystal veins.' Jones, \textit{The Ancient British Goddess}, p. 153.}
\end{footnotes}
peoples. She speculates on the meaning of ‘[b]urial in a fetal position’ suggesting that Neanderthals may have thought that we are returned to the body of the Mother of the Living and the Dead. Perhaps Neanderthals believed as well that we would be reborn, individually or communally, from the womb of the Mother.” Christ is thereby illustrating how long-standing she believes the concept of birth/death/rebirth actually is.

Goddess writers’ understanding of the built environment is that it was designed to be in harmony and alignment with the natural embodiment of the Goddess. This attention to aesthetics and design enabled the Goddess to be viewed and experienced physically in the environment. Visualising the Goddess in their built environment or seeing symbols of her in standing stones supposedly enabled people to feel connected to their deity at all times. A further way in which people were connected to their environment and deity was through the rituals and festivals that honoured the earth and moon’s cycles.

Lunar, seasonal and agricultural cycles: ensuring fertility

Goddess writers include descriptions of festivals in their constructions of the “Golden Age” – festivals that usually mark particular stages in lunar, seasonal, and agricultural cycles – thus indicating the apparent significance of the natural environment and its cycles to pre-patriarchal people. Starhawk, for example, describes the festive atmosphere at particular times of the year. She explains that ‘[o]n the great seasonal festivals – the solstices and equinoxes, and the eves of May, August, November, and February, – all the countryside would gather to light huge bonfires, feast, dance, sing, and perform the rituals that assured abundance throughout the year.’ The festivals, and their accompanying rituals, marked the important stages in the solar cycles and the earth’s seasons and were a gesture to ensure the earth’s fertility in the form of food production. The particular rituals would supposedly have enabled worshippers to acknowledge gratitude to the earth, and the atmosphere of dancing and singing is presented as being celebratory. They are a prime example of people showing reverence for ecology. They are also an example of the analogies made between the Goddess, women, and the earth – their bodies and cycles.

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90 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 50.
91 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, pp. 50–51.
In the imagined Avebury the Goddess was embodied in the landscape, and her stages of life, which corresponded to particular seasons, were enacted and celebrated. Elinor Gadon claims that, in the third millennium BCE at Avebury, the Goddess’s life stages, such as puberty, marriage, childbirth, and death, were celebrated throughout the year by the whole community. According to Gadon, Michael Dames argues that the landscape of monuments at Avebury was created as the stage for a year-long, and annual, religious drama. Gadon explains that

[each structure, human-made or natural, offered in turn a setting for the celebration of a particular event in the agricultural year that matched the corresponding event in the life cycle of the Goddess, for example, the harvest and childbirth. The “architecture” of the entire cycle was designed to be read as a sequence of visual images as the Great Goddess changed from child to maiden, to mother, to crone. These gigantic forms were regarded as living characters whose transformation from one role to the next was confirmed by the disappearance and reappearance of the local rivers at different seasons.]

This description is an example of the celebration of the Goddess and her cycles being inextricably linked to the celebration of the earth’s seasons. The Goddess’s cycles are only evident with the seasonal changes in the local rivers; the two are inseparable. Not only are nature’s rhythms intertwined with the Goddess’s, but they are also reflected in, and connected to, women’s cycles. For example, as Keller describes,

[respect for the triple-aspected Goddess was also expressed in devotions to the moon, Selene, who passes through three phases – waxing youth, maturing fullness, and waning toward darkness and the unknown – before beginning another cycle. As we know, women’s fertility cycles are closely tied to lunar cycles, and these in turn are linked to the measuring of seasonal cycles for the favorable planting and harvesting of crops.]

Women’s menstrual cycles, the Goddess’s cycles, the lunar cycles and the cycles of the seasons are all linked and represented anthropomorphically.

The festivals illustrate, more generally, the concept of oneness; the interconnection between humans with their environment, physically and spiritually. To repeat the festivals routinely would presumably have reinforced their purposes and narratives. The life cycles are also perpetuated in myths, such as in Diane Stein’s tale of Persephone’s life cycle in the following excerpt:

Persephone is born at the Winter Solstice and her childhood is the spring. She discovers the labyrinth at the time of her menarche, Summer Solstice,

93 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 69.
94 Dames, The Silbury Treasure, paraphrased in Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 70.
95 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, pp. 70–71.
97 The Goddess’s life story, for example, would have cyclically reinforced and perpetuated the narrative. Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 71.
and enters it. She reaches Hecate at Lammas, and the time of Demeter’s grief climaxes with the Fall Equinox. The year wanes and plant life dies. Demeter finds Persephone in the underworld at Hallows and the daughter returns with her, enters the world newborn again at Winter. Life returns with rebirth in the spring, with the blooming of Persephone’s coming home.98

Again the connection between a Goddess’s life cycle and the seasons is apparent. Like the countryside festivals that featured in the annual calendar, myths and legends about the Goddess’s cycles are another way of reinforcing the relationship between the deity and the earth and of continuing the Goddess’s life story.

The anthropomorphic imagery in the descriptions of the natural landscape, the built environment and festivals to honour the earth’s cycles constantly draws parallels between women, the Goddess, and the earth. The analogies show close links between all the aspects of the cosmos; the similarities engender an idea of connection and harmony. Such close ties demand positive treatment of animals and the earth. An important feature of the anthropomorphic imagery in the literature is that it is all female; the earth is female, the Goddess is female and their bodies and cycles resemble women’s bodies and cycles. There is a noticeable absence of male imagery and characteristics in symbols of nature, although standing stones would otherwise seem obviously masculine. Connecting women with nature is very much an ecofeminist perspective. Such a narrative implies that it is serving the interests of women who are intent on creating a woman-centred religion and society. This resembles the early second-wave feminist approach in which masculinities were not discussed; the focus was on finding or (re)creating an autonomous and empowering space for women.99 The Goddess mythistory of the “Golden Age” is a prime example of the conscious omission of men from society and religion. Goddess writers wilfully refuse to see male imagery in, for instance, the standing stones – they see what they wish to see. The emphasis on the female body in the analogies reflects a feminism that sets out to liberate women and their bodies – women who have been trapped by their maternal and fertile bodies. The Goddess writers’ imagery of the earth, deity and women distinctly refers to the reproductive organs and processes and their aim is to celebrate the fertile female body and its cycles.

98 Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 41. Stein also uses the creation story of Demeter and Persephone to explain winter in the following: ‘Demeter’s denial of life while Persephone is dead in the underworld consists of the barrenness of winter, the denial of the growth of life’s plants.’ Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book, p. 39.
Goddess writers find support for their contention that pre-patriarchal people respected the environment in the way that Goddess cultures supposedly imaged their deity in the landscape and the built environment and celebrated the earth’s cycles in seasonal festivals. Furthermore, writers use their interpretations of art to support their argument that humans respected the earth. Goddess writers describe images of humans in harmony with nature, of Goddesses accompanied by animals, of animals as epiphanies of the Goddess, and of images of Goddesses as metaphors of the earth’s fertility. While art is undoubtedly an excellent source to suggest that Goddess worshippers revered nature, its use also implies that Goddess cultures were civilised, creative, cultured, dynamic and highly skilled.

IV. Representations of ecological relationships in art

Palaeolithic cave art and figurines, Neolithic sculptures, as well as Minoan frescoes, jewellery and pottery, abound with images and symbols of nature and undoubtedly provide a rich social commentary for viewers to gain an insight into past times. Goddess writers use their particular interpretations of pre-patriarchal art to reconstruct and highlight the relationships between prehistoric people, their female deity and nature. The famous “Venus figures”, for example, known for their prominent breasts and bellies, are thought to represent the earth’s fecundity100 and its role as the source of life. ‘[O]ften they were painted with red ochre’, which Carol Christ speculates ‘symbolized the blood of birth, the blood of life.’101 In the images of the Goddess with animal companions, found in Palaeolithic and Neolithic cave art, the accompanying animals are interpreted as representing some or all of the Goddess’s characteristics. In some artworks animals appear in place of a Goddess’s body part102 or in place of the Goddess altogether. The particular animal’s quality perhaps represented the Goddess’s aspect better than did the human form. According to Rachel Pollack, ‘the toad and frog’, for example, ‘became important because their form resembles a woman squatting to give birth.’103 Sjöö and Mor explain that the Goddess was represented in art as an animal because ‘She was herself an animal’ and, therefore, ‘in most of the early images the Goddess wears an animal mask.’104

100 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 8.
104 Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 20.
In return for being provided for by nature, humans respected, revered and learnt from it. In the Goddess writers’ re-imagined world of the Neolithic, epiphanies of the Goddess were often the animals that, in the writers’ perception, were interacted with and observed on a daily basis. In Old Europe the manifestations of the Goddess were related to animals, plants, earth or sea. As Gadon explains,

[a] complex persona, the European Great Goddess had many manifestations. She was the Bird Goddess, the Snake Goddess, the Mistress of the Waters who creates the world, the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess who was fertility itself. Her epiphanies were the animals and the insects, the bees and the butterflies through whom she projected her powers of regeneration.\textsuperscript{105}

The fact that Goddesses were represented by particular animals or were human/animal composites, as was often the case with Goddess images in Old Europe,\textsuperscript{106} suggests to Goddess writers that these societies held nature in high regard.

Several Goddess writers, such as Elinor Gadon, Riane Eisler and Carol Christ, applaud Minoan Art for its beauty, subject matter and advanced techniques. Elinor Gadon, for example, claims that the frescoes, pottery and jewellery of Minoan Crete have a level of sophistication unequalled before or since\textsuperscript{107} and Eisler hails the artwork for its uniqueness, naturalness and celebration of life.\textsuperscript{108} Goddess writers, of course, are not alone in their praise or in their interpretation; art historians, for instance, also view the Minoan civilisation as unique when contextualised in the broader sphere of prehistoric art and understand the art to reveal a civilisation with sensitivity to nature.\textsuperscript{109} The artwork from the prehistoric Minoan era, therefore, is a perfect source for Goddess writers for what it can be interpreted to say about women, the Goddess and attitudes to nature.

From the Minoan frescoes and pottery design to motifs intricately engraved and etched on necklaces, rings, and seals, the art is applauded by Goddess writers for capturing

\textsuperscript{105}Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{106}Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{107}Gadon, \textit{The Once and Future Goddess}, p. 107.
delight in movement, spirit and life. Elinor Gadon stresses its uniqueness in the way it both expresses and celebrates life and life’s fleeting moments. She explains, for example, that ‘[t]he artist’s uncanny genius was to capture the essential spirit of the creature in its natural habitat like dolphins frolicking in an azure sea’. Carol Christ highlights the rhythmical forms in the frescoes and pottery. She observes that ‘images of waves, spirals, frolicking dolphins, undulating snakes, graceful bull leapers are everywhere. The Minoans captured life in motion. Exuberant movement must have represented to them the dance of life, the dance of the Lady. The ideas of harmony and celebration of life, so accentuated in the descriptions, clearly lend themselves to appropriation by Goddess writers. The writers assume that their interpretations of the artworks reflect Minoan society. Presumably, Gadon’s description of Minoan Crete (3000–1500 BCE), as ‘a free, joyous society, where people lived in peace and in harmony with nature’, is an assumption based on her interpretation of the art. Extrapolating the narratives in art to explain society is always a contentious methodology, but is nevertheless prevalent and, in Goddess literature, unquestioned. Another interesting feature of Goddess writers’ descriptions of Minoan art is their emphasis on its uniqueness. To emphasise the originality of the art of one pre-patriarchal location surely raises the question of the extent to which Goddess and nature worship occurred in other parts of Europe where this unique art was not produced.

While Goddess writers discuss Minoan frescoes, sculptures and pottery, they make surprisingly few comments about the gold signet rings that were discovered in and near the Minoan palace of Knossos, which should suggest themselves as a source for Goddess writers. The rings exhibit extraordinary artisanship. The remarkable techniques of the goldsmiths are only surpassed by the overwhelming stories, tales and epiphanies represented in the engravings that depict Goddesses, scenes of tree worship, and groups of dancing women. If the rings are mentioned at all in Goddess literature, it

111 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 87.
113 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 87.
114 Like the other artworks, the signet rings could presumably be read as texts to gain insight into the Minoan world view. Greek archaeologists and authors of an exhibition booklet, Nota Dimopoulou and Yorgos Rethemiotakis, state that the Ring of Minos is ‘of great value for the interpretation of Minoan religious iconography.’ Nota Dimopoulou and Yorgos Rethemiotakis, *The Ring of Minos and Gold Minoan Rings*, Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens, 2004, p. 15. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis claim that the three depictions of the Goddess on the ring combine to express Minoan religious beliefs. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis, *The Ring of Minos*, p. 18.
is only in passing. Carol Christ, for example, includes a photo of one of the rings in her book *The Laughter of Aphrodite*, but makes no reference to it. In *When God was a Woman*, Merlin Stone mentions ‘the intricate craftsmanship of gold signet rings and seals that depict scenes of the Goddess and Her priestesses’, in Mycenaean artefacts, to highlight the similarities of Mycenaean artwork on mainland Greece with that of Minoan Crete. Later in her book, Stone mentions signet rings, along with clothing styles, murals, seals and artefacts, again to show the similarity of Minoan Cretan culture to Mycenaean culture, thereby highlighting the survival of Minoan beliefs and practices in the succeeding culture. Elinor Gadon is unusual in actually commenting on the narrative of two particular signet rings. Even so, she only devotes a short paragraph to the topic in what is an extensive book on visual representations of the Goddess. Her remark is as follows:

> [t]he same rhapsodic mood celebrating nature is conveyed in the miniature scenes engraved on the gold signet rings that most fully capture the Cretan vision of the Goddess. On one we find her sitting casually, knees up, under a tree to receive offerings of fruits and poppies... This is perhaps a summer festival. On another ring the Goddess is descending to join ecstatic devotees who dance in a meadow full of lilies.

She also includes images of the two rings. If the signet rings, as Gadon claims, capture the ‘vision of the Goddess’ most fully, and strongly connect the Goddess to nature, then it is surprising that she and others do not make more use of them. Their lack of interest in this rich source is difficult to interpret, but could perhaps be due to a lack of access to them, as the most extensive collection is housed in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, and also due to the fact that the most famous signet ring, “The ring of Minos”, dated 1450–1400 BC, went missing for many decades. The ring miraculously reappeared, but has only been housed in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum since 2002.
Whatever the case, the representation of nature in artworks is a useful source for Goddess writers in imagining Goddess cultures’ attitudes to nature. Goddess writers understand Palaeolithic art to honour and represent women’s and the earth’s fecundity. They interpret images of the Goddess masked as an animal, as can be found in Palaeolithic and Neolithic art, to imply a close relationship between humans and animals. The most significant interpretation of Minoan art for the Goddess mythistory is that all life was revered and, as a result, humans lived in harmony with nature. Emphasis is also placed on the uniqueness and quality of techniques used in the execution of the art, all of which contribute to the claim that this society was cultured, creative, artistic and, simultaneously, at one with nature – again highlighting a non-dualistic philosophy.

**Conclusion**

According to Goddess writers’ mythistory, pre-patriarchal people understood their deity to be immanent in the earth and embodied in the landscape. As a result, they had a sensibility towards nature that resulted in sustainable living – any other outcome would be inconceivable in such a worldview. Several themes have arisen in this elucidation of the “Golden Age”. Firstly, regardless of the different phases within the overall period of time under consideration, any changes are represented as gradual and positive. The transition from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic, for example, is constructed as a natural evolution in which the skills of hunter/gatherers, such as intuition, were not lost for ever, but, in fact, were utilised to create an even more civilised and, at the same time, environmentally-aware society. A second theme concerns the analogies made between the bodies and cycles of the Goddess, the earth and women, which serve to connect all of life on earth with their deity and result in creating harmonious relationships and an ecological consciousness. There is no space for conflict between humans and nature in this perspective.

and a female adorant, while a third Goddess is steering a boat across the sea (bottom). The museum’s summary of the scene is stated thus: ‘The Goddess’s passage through the three elements, air, earth, and sea, unifies symbolically the visible world, consecrates and fertilizes nature, makes the sea calm and conveys effectively the message of Minoan power over land and sea.’ The description is from Heraklion Archaeological Museum, which I recorded in September 2005. The male and female adorants worshipping sacred trees is the predominant scene and highlights Minoans’ attitudes to nature. Tree worship is depicted in other gold Minoan signet rings.
Thirdly, throughout the literature, there is a predominant focus on women. Women are credited, for example, with understanding the environment intimately enough to invent agriculture and the methods to deal with their new produce and surpluses. The female, her mind, body and cycles, is seen as the source of life, knowledge, and harmony with nature. The Goddess, the landscape, and the built environment are imaged with female features, not male ones. Similarly, the art abounds with images of Goddesses and female fecundity. Women’s reproductive biological functions are emphasised in Goddess literature and linked to those of the earth. These connections imply that women are more empathetic and understanding of nature and have special ways of knowing nature, its cycles and functions, because these are a reflection of their own. This is an exclusively female-centred worldview. Females’ biological difference is seen to be empowering, not the cause of oppression or a limitation on their roles. This shows a desire to create a female world, which reflects a particular strand of feminism prevalent in the early days of second-wave feminism when the focus was solely on women (with the intention of creating an empowering space for them) and on women’s bodies (with the endeavour of celebrating rather than condemning women to their bodies and maternity). The strong connection claimed by Goddess writers to exist between women and nature is a perspective shared by ecofeminists.

A fourth theme, which is evident throughout the literature and interpretations of the arts, is the endeavour to present the pre-patriarchal Goddess culture as civilised, cultured, intuitive, and dynamic, as opposed to primitive, passive and violent. The period’s sophisticated art and technology was used to sustain, not to destroy. There is an emphasis on dynamism, movement, and energy – for example, swirls, spirals and snakes in Cretan art. These emphases are all part of the endeavour to stress that Goddess worship was a non-dualistic philosophy. It could, therefore, be cultured and integrated into nature at the same time. A repercussion of this philosophy is that mundane interactions with nature were also considered to be spiritual events. The spiritual domain was inseparable from worldly activities, as well as animal and earthly cycles. This emphasis on non-dualistic thinking, interconnectedness and oneness, which has underlain this chapter, differentiates the ecologically-conscious "Golden Age” Goddess cultures from the hierarchical, dualistic, patriarchal culture that followed. This deterioration will be explored in the following chapter.
Chapter Six: The “Fall” and attitudes to nature: a deteriorating ecological consciousness under the patriarchy

Long after city dwellers had converted to Christianity, the Witches were the wise women and cunning men of the country villages. They were the herbalists, the healers, the counselors in times of trouble. Their seasonal celebrations established the bond between individuals, the community as a whole, and the land and its resources. That bond, that deep connection, was the source of life – human, plant, animal, and spiritual. Without it, nothing could grow. From the power within that relationship came the ability to heal, to divine the future, to build, to create, to make songs, to birth children, to build culture. The bond was erotic, sensual, carnal, because the activities of the flesh were not separate from the spirit immanent in life.

The history of patriarchal civilization could be read as a cumulative effort to break that bond, to drive a wedge between spirit and flesh, culture and nature, man and woman. One of the major battles in that long war of conquest was fought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the persecutions of the Witches shattered the peasants’ connection with the land, drove women out of the work of healing, and imposed the mechanist view of the world as a dead machine. That rupture underlies the entwined oppressions of race, sex, class, and ecological destruction.


Introduction

Starhawk evokes a long period in which the resilient worshippers of the Old Religion survived persistent attacks from the patriarchy and managed to continue their practices in rural areas. She emphasises the Pagans’ connections to the land and nature, as well as their holistic philosophy. In this interpretation, the Old Religion, however, is finally overcome as a consequence of the witch persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Patriarchal religion’s relentless endeavour to sever the Pagans’ ties with their deity, land and nature eventually results in the ultimate annihilation: destruction of and alienation from nature, and the manifestation of a dualistic philosophy in which the natural world is denigrated and separated from the realms of culture and spirit.1

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1 As it is explained in Chapter Three, in the Goddess mythistory numerous attacks against the nature-centred Goddess worshipping cultures had been ongoing for centuries prior to the early modern witch-hunts. What is being termed the “Fall”, therefore, is actually a series of “Falls”, which commences with the war-mongering Kurgan invaders and their sky gods, and is followed by infiltrations from various movements and religions, including Ancient Greek polytheism and Judeo-Christian monotheism. Refer to Chapter Three for details of the series of events that feature in the Goddess writers’ mythistory of the “Fall”.

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Few writers outside of the Goddess movement respond specifically to the Goddess writers' portrayal of the deterioration of respect for nature in patriarchal society. Several ecofeminists, however, have similarly sought causes for the earth's destruction. While they might not include patriarchal conquest in the religious sphere as a factor, they indict patriarchal institutions and practices and, like Goddess writers, link women and nature in their subjugation. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, regards the Neolithic invention of plough agriculture as instrumental in changing the power relations between men and women, and between humans and nature. Unlike Ruether, Carolyn Merchant disregards the impact of the iron plough, but pursues the theme of agricultural practices. In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant argues that the early modern period was the most damaging time for women and nature due to the changes in agrarian practices and arrangements fostered by the scientific revolution and the market economy. Many ecofeminist interpretations, however, do not look to specific events in the distant past at all. They deal with the declining ecological consciousness as a twentieth/twenty-first century problem and, therefore, seek explanations in contemporary times and recent history. Greta Gaard, for example, finds the association between women and nature, a primary tenet in Goddess worship, problematic because in our western society, she argues, it condemns nature to a devalued position.

In Goddess literature, these scholars' comments have had a mixed influence. Firstly, regarding Ruether's argument about plough agriculture, Goddess literature almost completely ignores this explanation, which, on the surface, fits their mythistory.

4 Greta Gaard provides an insightful explanation for our harmful treatment of the earth. Gaard finds the metaphor of "mother earth" problematic and suggests that rather than engendering positive connections between women and the earth it can actually lead to the mistreatment of the earth. Gaard points out that the 'Native American conception of Mother Earth ... cannot be stolen from Native American cultures and used in Western culture while retaining the same meaning.' She demonstrates that in white western culture mothering is devalued and, therefore, that connecting women with nature in the "mother earth" metaphor only serves to devalue nature. Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?,' in Greta Gaard (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 301–302. Gaard refers to the work of Nancy Chodorow and Adrienne Rich when she claims that 'the institution of mothering has been a primary locus of women's subordination.' Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1978; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Bantam Books, New York, 1976. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Gaard also provides several examples of how feminising the earth is problematic, indicting the approach as flawed because of its anthropomorphism. Gaard, 'Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures,' pp. 303–304.
However, it will become evident later in this chapter that the timing of this invention (occurring in the Neolithic) would challenge the Goddess mythistory of Neolithic culture as unharmful to nature and would also suggest the change came from within Goddess society. Furthermore, it follows that due to the fact that the Goddess mythistory of the “Golden Age” is presented as a period of ecological harmony, Goddess writers are unable to engage with the wealth of archaeological and prehistorical studies that demonstrate environmental degradation because of human management of the land, such as slash-and-burn agriculture. Secondly, the influence of Carolyn Merchant’s ideas will be illuminated, particularly in the case of Starhawk’s adoption of them. Following Merchant, Starhawk is not perturbed by plough agriculture or any other examples of environmental problems until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which she declares expropriation of the land took place. In contrast to Gaard, Goddess writers highlight the connection between women and nature as empowering and are unlikely to engage with her ideas.

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the Goddess writers’ perceptions of human relationships with nature and the earth during the “Fall” period. The primary concern is to consider the changes to ecological relationships that are perceived to have been caused by the patriarchy. Two emphases dominate the Goddess literature – firstly, Goddess writers stress that the earth-revering attitudes of the Old Religion managed to continue; secondly, they highlight the destruction of ecological relationships, which they attribute to patriarchal religion, philosophy and society. This chapter will investigate the dual arguments of nature-worship survival and destruction by discussing the different ways in which the two are understood to have occurred. It will also contend that there is a comparative dearth of Goddess literature on the theme of ecology in the “Fall” period and will endeavour to provide reasons for this absence.

To begin with the theme of survival, I will, firstly, analyse the Goddess writers’ assertion that the Old Religion was more likely to survive in rural areas, where villagers had access to, reliance on, and day-to-day contact with the land, nature and its cycles. This argument sets up a dichotomy between rural and urban life or between life on the periphery and life in the centres of civilisation. I will argue that in the Goddess mythistory a person’s geography and class is more likely to determine their relationship to ecology than their gender. Secondly, I will demonstrate that many references to the survival of nature worship can be found lingering faintly in the religious sphere.
Goddess writers, for instance, trace hints of the pre-patriarchal Goddess’s nature-related characteristics in the transformed Goddesses of patriarchal pantheons. They also argue that Christianity inherited or assimilated many traditions (such as festivals based on the cycles of the moon and seasons), symbols and sacred sites, all of which compel respect for nature.

Regarding the argument of destruction of human–nature relations, I will investigate the ways in which Goddess writers argue that ecological relationships are impaired by patriarchal religions, philosophy, and society. Firstly, in religion, replacing an immanent deity, embodied in the earth, with a transcendental deity (that is, separated and disconnected from the earth) is understood to have grave implications for nature. In philosophy, Goddess writers argue that the patriarchy introduced dualistic thinking. In such a worldview, nature is disconnected from culture, mind and spirit, and, thus, is considered to be merely matter. Furthermore, this philosophy is expressed in architecture, which disembodies the deity from the landscape, and in iconoclasm, which literally removes the deity from visual experiences.

Secondly, the implications of two agricultural revolutions will be assessed – plough agriculture during the Neolithic and enclosure during the early modern period. Patriarchal practices and developments (in agriculture, science and economics) have impacted on nature to varying degrees. The invention of the iron plough, for instance, is viewed as ‘rape of the earth’ by Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor. Starhawk, however, is unperturbed by this Neolithic invention, but highlights early modern developments (such as the enclosure of land, the scientific revolution, and the introduction of capitalism) as dislocating humans from their environment.

I. Survival of nature worship: where and how?

Goddess writers’ emphasis on the survival of nature worship and respect for the environment during the era of patriarchal dominance is essential to their overarching argument of continuity. They assert unquestionable links between country-dwellers

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7 As discussed in Chapter Three, a common theme in the “Fall” narrative is one of survival and continuity. Goddess writers emphasise the resilience of the Old Religion despite attempts by the patriarchy to eliminate it. For some writers, the Old Religion managed to survive outside of Christianity.
and their environment to explicitly support the mythistory of survival of the Old Religion. They observe more subtle evidence of survival in the Pagan inheritance of the new religions. These assertions call for investigation.

Geography of the ecological “Fall”: survival of human–nature relations in the countryside

A recurring theme in Goddess literature of the “Fall” is that rural folk remained connected to nature and managed to continue practising the Old Religion because, firstly, they were in constant contact with agriculture and thus were aware of the cycles of the seasons and moon, and, secondly, that rural areas provided sanctuary for the under-classes and space for them to practise nature worship. The corollary is that urban people were dislocated from nature and thus had no ecological consciousness. These assertions are unsurprising, but have interesting implications for geography, class and gender, and also neglect some other possible social arrangements. Furthermore, in the Goddess writers’ representation, as the centuries pass by even rural areas suffer from patriarchal incursions and the marginalised are forced into ever more peripheral areas such as forests.

While mainstream culture in the cities may have embraced, or been unable to fend off, monotheistic religion and other patriarchal practices, many Goddess writers suggest that the Old Religion managed to survive outside the cities. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor are scathing about cities and blame this patriarchal development in history for humans’ alienation from their roots in mother nature and for what they term the rape of nature.8 Starhawk’s approach, which is to focus on the countryside rather than the urban areas, is more common in Goddess literature. Starhawk, for example, claims that healers, herbalists, wise women and cunning men survived in country villages.9 The rural folk are presented as being connected to the land and to the rhythm of existence through

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8 Sjöö and Mor, *The Ancient Religion*, pp. 63–64.
9 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1988, p. xxvi. See, for example, Starhawk’s quotation at the opening of this chapter.
their agricultural way of life. The implication of this interpretation is that among rural folk, who were connected to the land and continued their old traditions and practices, the patriarchy had less influence than it did in the urban areas. A person’s milieu and class, therefore, rather than gender, are the crucial determinants of their ecological consciousness; the suggestion is that not *all* men in *all* locations are the cause of environmental destruction.

In the Goddess writers’ perceptions, festivals with roots in pre-patriarchal Europe were held as people continued to have ties to the land and to the agricultural cycles, even in mediaeval Christian Europe. Starhawk emphasises the unity created by festivals and Pagan traditions between the community and their environment. She explains, for example, that

> [t]he maypole, the bonfires on the ancient Celtic feast days, the traditional dances and customs were tied to the seasons and the changing round of the agricultural year. They expressed the integration of the community with the land, and the changing cycles of the seasons in a never-ending round of renewal. While in many places their original meanings were undoubtedly forgotten, they continued to encourage feelings of local pride and bound the participants to each other.11

Starhawk insightfully conveys the peasants’ sense of community, identity and belonging, which she ascribes to their ties to the land and its cycles. The sense of oneness between humans and the earth, so prevalent in the Goddess writers’ descriptions of humans’ connections with nature in the pre-patriarchal period, continued, according to Starhawk, in mediaeval Europe.12

An interesting feature of Starhawk’s depiction is that she refers to the peasant class as the one connected to the land. While it is understandable that classes pre-occupied with commerce and learning in urban centres would have been removed from the land, Starhawk neglects any consideration of the landed gentry, abbots/abbesses, monks/nuns, and other social groups in the complex feudal agricultural system. In mediaeval times, for instance, religious orders often established monasteries on large country estates and were required to manage their agricultural production.13 According to Starhawk’s interpretation, however, the Old Religion managed to survive in particular locations and

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10 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. xxvi.
11 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 197.
12 Starhawk implies that these seasonal celebrations, festivals and associated customs were able to continue in rural areas up until the time of enclosure, which she suggests occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
within a particular class, thus implying that the peasant class was less patriarchal or less influenced by the patriarchy than the other classes that lived in rural areas.

In the Goddess mythistory, the end of the mediaeval period and the onset of the early modern European witchcraft persecutions resulted in the Old Religion being practised in ever more secluded and peripheral areas, such as deep in forests. Starhawk's understanding, which is still one of survival, is that, so long as forests continued to exist, witches and other marginalised groups had somewhere to maintain their pre-patriarchal traditions. She imagines a scene from this time in the following excerpt:

[s]he turns and looks deep into the forest. For a moment she is tempted to turn around, to follow the pathway further than she has ever been. Some have said the Old Race still lives in the forest's hidden center. Would they shelter her? Or would she find the camps of the master-less, the tinkers, the outlaws, those who had been driven, like herself, off the land? Would it be a freer life under the trees? Could they use a healer? And would they someday swarm out from the woods and wastes, an army of the dispossessed, to tear down the fences of the overlords, the manor houses, and the churches, to reclaim their own land for freedom?

She is still. But finally she shoulders her basket and starts off, back toward the village. Young Jonet at the mill is near her time, and the old woman knows it will be a difficult birth. She will need the herbs in this basket.

She is afraid but she walks on. "We have always survived," she tells herself. "We will always survive."

She repeats it, over and over again, like an incantation.14

In this depiction, the Old Religion was forced out of the country villages and into the forests, where it was practised in secrecy. In an atmosphere of witch persecutions and enclosure of communal lands, the witches, nature worshippers, healers and other marginalised groups became social outcasts in their villages and were forced to be forest-dwellers. Despite being driven off their land, the marginalised at least found safe havens in the forests. This "Fall" is chronological and geographical; it worsens with time and, as it worsens, survival occurs in increasingly peripheral locations. In the Goddess writers' interpretation, the Old Religion lives on in the forests, out of sight and mind of the encroaching Christians. It is no coincidence that the nature-worshipping religion is believed to survive in forests, perceived to be the most wild, natural and least polluted locations of all. The tamed countryside, it seems, becomes less distinguishable from urban centres and is viewed in contrast to the wild forests. Therefore, the wilder the location, and the further it is from urban centres, the more natural it is believed to be and the safer it is imagined for the persecuted.15

14 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, pp. 184–185.
15 This rural/urban contrast, I would argue, which is common in Goddess literature, is influenced by late eighteenth/nineteenth-century Romantic poetry. Refer to Ronald Hutton, 'The Discovery of the Modern
The emphasis on the forests as a haven for marginalised groups ignores early modern historiography that suggests that enclosure often caused the marginalised to find refuge in the cities. It also neglects the fact that Christian hermits were known to have lived in forests and deserts, or that Christian orders, such as the Benedictines, had penetrated into forests well before the early modern period. It would not, of course, be in the interest of the Goddess mythistory of the "Fall" to claim that a nature-worshipper found sanctuary in a town, as urban centres are depicted as realms of patriarchal society, institutions and religion.

In Starhawk’s imaginings she hints at the possibility of a revolution and of a subsequent reclamation of land. In this sense the mythistory inspires social action to retrieve what belonged to the dispossessed (not through any form of legal ownership, but through birthright). Overall, there is a strong emphasis on survival – an awareness of Paganism’s longevity, continuity, and resilience throughout this tragic period in history.

Assimilation by the new culture: inheritance of nature worship

Goddess writers find evidence for the continuity of ecological relationships during the “Fall” period from remnants of nature worship that they perceive in patriarchal polytheism, mystery religions, Christianity and at sacred sites. Some Goddess writers


16 The historian Joan Thirsk, however, describes forests (in England during the sixteenth century, at least) as havens where the ‘landless and luckless poor’ enjoyed freedom from resident gentlemen and could live sustainably by being involved in a forest economy (using timber in productive ways, rearing livestock, as well as hunting deer, hares or rabbits). Joan Thirsk, Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History in England, 1500–1750, Macmillan Education, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1987, pp. 49–50. Despite the gradual deforestation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, due to, for instance, population pressures, Thirsk argues that the poor had more freedom, variety and chance of survival in forests than in arable areas. Thirsk, Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History, pp. 50–51.

17 Before founding monasteries, St. Benedict (c. 480-c. 550), for example, fled the ‘worldly city’ of Rome, where he was to be educated, ‘and took up the hermit life in a cave near the ruins of Nero’s country palace.’ Hollister, Medieval Europe, p. 57. Pagans, therefore, did not have a monopoly on nature or wilderness.

18 Hollister, for example, writes that the Benedictines ‘spearheaded the penetration of Christianity into the forests of Germany and later into Scandinavia, Poland, and Hungary.’ Hollister, Medieval Europe, p. 58.

19 See, particularly, Sjöö and Mor for scathing depictions of the city. For example, they claim that ‘the city emerges as man’s ultimate attempt to become man-made, born from himself rather than from Mother Nature.’ In their representation, city man neglects the fact that the sources for living continue to come from the land; ‘[h]e no longer works with the earth, he buys it. The ancient energy-exchange between humans and nature becomes a money-exchange between humans only.’ Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 63. Italics in original.

20 That is, in the quotation by Starhawk on the previous page.
discern traits of pre-patriarchal Goddesses, which indicate nature worship, in the succeeding Goddesses of, for instance, the Greek pantheon. Carol Christ, for example, highlights how in classical mythology the Goddess Athena displays characteristics inherited from earlier Goddesses. According to Christ, Athena is represented with animal companions (the owl and snakes), is known as ‘the ancient Goddess of the Rock’, and is associated with agricultural Goddesses because of the way she produced an olive tree to defeat Poseidon in their contest for Athens.21 Athena is presented as a Goddess with links to both pre-patriarchal agricultural Goddesses and earlier pre-agricultural Goddesses. Symbols of nature and references to agriculture associated with the Old Religion, therefore, are perceived to be evidence of its, at least partial, continuity and influence, for those willing and able to recognise the fragments from pre-patriarchal societies.

Another example of the survival of nature reverence can be found, according to Elinor Gadon, in the mystery religions.22 With reference to agricultural people in Europe, Gadon suggests that the Goddess Demeter’s cult survived because she ‘better served the spiritual needs of a people who were still connected to the earth as a living being’ than did Christianity.23 An assertion that Demeter met the needs of the agricultural people would suggest that she maintained her characteristic traits of an agriculture-, nature- and land-oriented deity.24 The survival of Goddesses that are associated with nature, particular sites, or with the land in some way, such as with agriculture, implies that there was at least some continuation of affirming attitudes towards nature in some locations and time periods. This factor of the Old Religion’s continued relevance is important for the overall Goddess mythistory; the Old Religion did not disappear because it lost pertinence.

22 Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1989, p. 157. Mystery religions could only be accessed by the initiated. Elinor Gadon explains that ‘[i]n a world increasingly dominated by an alienation from the divine and a fear of death, the mysteries kept the spirit of the Goddess alive, honouring the sacredness of the life process. The enigma of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the extent of their appeal indicates the power the Goddess still had over the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire (third century BCE to fifth century CE).’ Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 143.
24 Charlene Spretnak describes Demeter as ‘the Grain-Mother, the giver of crops. Her origins are Cretan, and she has been strongly connected to Gaia and to Isis.’ Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978, p. 105.
A second area of survival applies to Christianity's Pagan inheritance of numerous nature-based traditions and symbols. Goddess writers emphasise Judaism and Christianity's inheritance of and links to the pre-patriarchal Pagan religion in the form, for example, of festivals, sacred sites, and important dates. Festivals that mark the lunar and seasonal cycles, as well as particular landscapes and sites, demand an awareness of, or relationship with, the environment. Several writers highlight the substantial Pagan inheritance of Judaism and Christianity in the annual religious calendars.25 Charlene Spretnak, for example, asks

> how many of us realize that the church sets Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox and that most of the Jewish holy days are determined by a lunar calendar? Numerous symbols, rituals, and names in Jewish and Christian holy days have roots directly in the nature-revering Old Religion.26

Spretnak and others illustrate how the lunar and seasonal cycles continued to be relevant during the patriarchal period in the new religion.27 The implication here is that knowledge of and respect for nature and its seasons continued to be important, even under patriarchal religions.

It is fascinating that despite the arguments from Goddess writers that the Virgin Mary was a mere shadow of the Goddess of pre-patriarchal times,28 Elinor Gadon and Marija Gimbutas portray strong connections between Mary and earlier earth-based Goddesses. Gimbutas claims that '[i]n later Christian times, the Birth Giver and Earth Mother fused with the Virgin Mary.'29 According to Gimbutas, the Virgin Mary continued to have connections with 'life-water', healing springs, trees, blossoms, flowers, fruits and


26 Spretnak, 'The Spiritual Dimension,' p. 300. Italics in original. Similarly, Elinor Gadon details the Christian accommodation of the Pagan winter solstice and Eostre in the following excerpt: '[m]ost pagan mysteries celebrated the birth of the Divine Child at the Winter Solstice. Christians also took this day for the birth of their savior god, Jesus Christ. Centuries later they were to select the first Sunday following the full moon after the Vernal Equinox as the anniversary of the resurrection of their god, naming it Easter after the Anglo Saxon Goddess Eostre, a northern form of Astarte.' Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 199. See also Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 71.

27 Not only are particular seasonal dates inherited. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor note that Christianity inherited Pagan symbols such as rabbits and eggs, which symbolise the Goddess's fertility. Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 71. See also Helen A. Berger, A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, South Carolina, 1999, p. 16. While some writers focus on the adoption of Pagan practices, others suggest that they were adapted and changed. Some Pagan symbols and practices, for example, were incorporated into the new religion with a reversal of their original values and meanings. Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 186.

28 Refer to Chapter Three of this thesis.

harvests. Gadon perceives links between the Virgin Mary and the agricultural Goddess Demeter. Gadon claims that in early Christianity Marian devotion was influenced by Goddesses of the Roman Empire, such as Isis, Artemis, Cybele and Demeter. She even asserts that ‘[s]ometimes Mary simply replaced Demeter as the protector of the crop.’ She also discusses the grain miracles of Mary in the late Middle Ages in which she claims that Mary fulfilled the Goddess’s role of guarding the crops. This is an interesting but contradictory argument because Gadon later, in the same text, implies that the Virgin Mary is removed from the life cycle, seasonal cycles, and cut off from the rhythm of life. While it may be difficult to recognise elements of nature worship in the Virgin Mary, a stronger and more common assertion in Goddess literature, supported to some degree by mediaeval historiography, is the mediaeval practice of building churches on Pagan sites of worship.

In Goddess literature, sites sacred to Goddess worshippers in pre-patriarchal times are perceived to have continued as sites of worship in Christianity. Thus, the specific locations that were earlier selected for their magical, spiritual, and topophilic significance were later the very sites where Romanesque churches and Gothic cathedrals were built. As the sacred sites were believed to have often been situated on springs and/or in alignment with certain features of the landscape, this view contends that Christians appreciated such Pagan forethought and, therefore, also valued the physical natural environment.

The sculptures of animals that feature on the tympanums and capitals of Gothic churches are further evidence to suggest that mediaeval Christian Europe maintained links with nature. Art historians, for example, acknowledge that medieval artists drew

31 Gadon, _The Once and Future Goddess_, p. 195.
32 Gadon, _The Once and Future Goddess_, p. 198.
33 Gadon, _The Once and Future Goddess_, pp. 206-207.
34 For example, as Elinor Gadon claims, ‘[s]hrines and temples of the Goddess were rededicated to the Virgin. The great Gothic cathedrals, for example, were all built on sites sacred to the Goddess, over holy springs and wells. Like the Goddess, the Virgin was often of a particular place.’ Gadon, _The Once and Future Goddess_, pp. 194-195. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor point out that the earliest Christian churches in Britain ‘were built precisely on the ancient Mounds and High-places of the Great Goddess.’ One such church, they mention, was built on the Glastonbury Tor. Sjöö and Mor, _The Ancient Religion_, p. 27. The town of Glastonbury is a prime example of the Christian religion thriving in a location that supposedly had a history of Goddess worship.
35 Gadon, _The Once and Future Goddess_, p. 195.
36 Of course, another interpretation is that using the same sites eased the transition to the new religion.
on millennia of animal lore. It is surprising that Goddess writers do not utilise the rich source material on mediaeval art production more substantially. Mediaeval religious paintings often set a biblical story in the foreground of a painting with a familiar, local landscape in the background. Elinor Gadon, however, is an exception and points out this practice, implying the importance of a sense of place. Despite being removed from nature while attending church, the parishioners were, therefore, constantly reminded of their locality in the art that adorned the church.

The survival of respectful relations between humans and nature is perceived to have occurred underground, through traditions, in the countryside, in particular landscapes, architecture, art and symbols. The extent of the survival depended very much on the location. At times it was merely abstract. Whatever the case, the notion of survival supports the mythistory of continuity. The implication of the Goddess argument for survival of Pagan traditions in Christianity is that the incorporation of Paganism was invaluable for the maintenance of ecological relationships. The inference is that without such an inheritance the ties would have been severed wholesale far earlier.

II. Disrespecting nature: patriarchal religion, philosophy, and representations of a disembodied deity

The infrequent references to nature in Goddess literature about the “Fall” provide, nevertheless, an insight into Goddess writers’ perceptions of the role of patriarchal religion and philosophy in articulating the malignant patriarchal attitudes to nature. Goddess writers’ image of dominating sky gods and scathing constructions of the Christian creation story provide background to their contention that the patriarchy created hierarchical dualistic thinking, which positioned women and nature together, on the lowest rung, in hierarchical opposition to males. Furthermore, expressions of this dualistic philosophy are found in representations of a disembodied male deity in art and the built environment. The following section will discuss these assertions.

According to Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor’s powerful descriptions, without exception patriarchal religions relegate the earth to material matters and elevate the spiritual realm

to the sky. The deity is, therefore, removed from the earth; thus abolishing every type of power and ability (for example, to create) from nature. Positioning the deity in the sky shifts procreative actions to the sun and eliminates the earth's role, as Sjöö and Mor suggest: '[t]he Sun Father was the Lord of the crops and measurer of the new Solar seasons. It was the Sun now who was seen to germinate the Seed with his phallic sunbeams.' Sjöö and Mor's portrayals provocatively reiterate a dualistic philosophy.

Similarly, Goddess writers depict the shattering of holistic thinking in their reproductions of patriarchal creation stories. Elinor Gadon's version of the Christian creation story from the book of Genesis, for example, is a reversal of the nature-affirming Neolithic creation stories and emphasises male domination and subjugation of the earth. Gadon's construction is as follows:

> the male god took over all creation. He created heaven and earth out of nothing, not out of his own body. He created by proclamation, not gestation. He created once and for all time, not through a dynamic process, the ongoing cycle of birth, death and regeneration. He created all living creatures. He created man first, in his own image, ordering him to fill the earth and subdue it. Man was to name all the living creatures, and to have his will with them.

The God of Christianity is portrayed as being disconnected from any body, from the cycles of life, and as the controller of nature. Furthermore, Gadon adds that in response to Adam and Eve's disobedience, God 'cursed the earth' and claimed that from that time on 'thistles and thorns would grow upon it.' Gloria Orenstein also considers the patriarchal creation story and claims that one result of having God as the creator is 'the ongoing rape and plundering of the natural world in the name of so-called progress.' Orenstein's interpretation shows that she draws a connection between the religion and society; that is, that religious stories inform and influence attitudes to nature. In addition, the Goddess writers' descriptions of God's behaviour towards the earth reflect

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41 According to Sjöö and Mor, for example, '[i]n patriarchal religion, *only God has power*. It does not exist in Nature, and it is not something he shares with his creatures. ... And no one may fly through the Night with the Moon, or envision other worlds, or commune with the Earth and the Stars, or cure illness with herbs – without being seen as an agent of the devil.' Sjöö and Mor, *The Ancient Religion*, p. 68. Italics in original.

42 In brackets they explain that to view the sun as responsible for germination is a false notion – 'all planets receive Sunlight, but only the one with Earth and Water grows anything.' Sjöö and Mor, *The Ancient Religion*, p. 64. Italics in original.

43 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 187. There are similarities in the Babylonian and Christian creation stories of “matter” and “earth” being subdued and controlled.


45 Gloria Feman Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1990, p. xviii. 'Furthermore,' Orenstein adds, 'the Father God cosmic story has also led to the poisoning of most organic life on the planet due to the misguided belief that if men cannot create life in wombs, then they will do so in laboratories.'
the descriptions of violent male sexuality, discussed earlier in this thesis in relation to women.\textsuperscript{46}

Goddess writers understand the treatment of women (and their bodies) to mirror the treatment of nature and vice versa.\textsuperscript{47} In Goddess literature on the “Fall” period this connection finds both women and nature being depicted in the most horrendous terms. In the following particularly evocative passive, Eve is linked with nature, and the descriptions of her bodily functions elicit the most grotesque comparisons:

\begin{quote}
Eve, cursed to bear children rather than blessed with motherhood, was identified with nature, a form of low matter that drags man’s soul down the spiritual ladder. In the faeces and urine – Augustine’s phrase – of childbirth, the closeness of woman to all that is vile, lowly, corruptible, and material was epitomized; in the “curse” of menstruation, she lay closer to the beasts; the lure of her beauty was nothing but an aspect of the death brought about by her seduction of Adam in the garden.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Women, nature and animals occupy the lowest rung of the spiritual ladder. Susan Griffin evokes an equally negative patriarchal attitude to women, nature and the earth. She claims that in the Judeo-Christian worldview ‘[t]he material world belongs to the devil. What’s under your feet is closer to hell, and the more sensual you are, the more open you are to being corrupted by the devil. Women, being closer to the Earth, listened to serpents, made people eat apples, and made them commit other sins.’\textsuperscript{49} In the previous chapter (Chapter Five) on the “Golden Age” a major theme was the strong and positive link perceived to exist between women, their bodies and nature. The connection continues to exist during the “Fall” period, but under patriarchal thinking its valuation is reversed and women/bodies/nature occupy inferior positions in a dualistic philosophy. In the Goddess writers’ representation of the patriarchal worldview, women/bodies/nature are merely matter without creative ability, spirituality, power, and are associated with the devil, sin and carnality. Transcendent God and man, however, exist disconnected from the earth and women, and manifest power over them. The patriarchal hierarchical dualistic philosophy, therefore, is reflected in, justifies and requires the subjugation of women and nature. Goddess writers would suggest that this dualistic way of thinking has become part of the western cultural consciousness and the

\textsuperscript{46} See Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{47} As Ruether succinctly explains the connection, ‘[t]he earth, as the place from which plant and animal life arises, became linked with the bodies of women, from which babies emerge.’ Ruether, ‘Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections,’ p. 15.
basis of western theology and philosophy. Goddess writers, such as Gadon, Griffin, Sjöö and Mor, claim or imply that the roots of hierarchical dualistic thinking are in patriarchal philosophies such as Judeo-Christian worldviews. The prime feature of the changes concerns power relations. Examples of dualistic thinking can be found in representations of the deity in which God is depicted as detached from the earth.

It can be argued that the disembodiment of the deity in patriarchal representations reflects the broader societal and religious changes that led to the subjugation of nature and disconnected the spiritual realm from it. One example is the detachment of the deity from landscapes in artistic representations – rather than situating and visualising the deity in the landscape, as was the case in Goddess cultures. Another most explicit example is the practice of iconoclasm.

When discussing respect for nature, land, and the environment in the "Golden Age" in the previous chapter, the theme of embodiment arose in relation to the Goddess being embodied in various Neolithic landscapes. In striking contrast, in the "Fall" period, the earlier imagining of an embodied deity existing in the landscape (in natural or human-made formations) is replaced by a deity removed from the landscape (in the built environment of a church). The earlier embodied deity becomes disembodied in the Christian houses of worship. The design of the sacred sites in the two periods display the deity's characteristic of immanence or transcendence. While the Goddess was believed to be immanent in nature and embodied in the landscape, the gods, according to Rachel Pollack, took on 'personalities distinct from nature.' Pollack explains, for example, that the elegant columns and statues of Greek temples 'evolve a deity more inspired by human culture than by the cycles of the Earth.'

50 Judith Todd is another to claim that dualistic and hierarchical thinking that opposes culture and nature has Greek and Judeo-Christian roots. She claims that specific writings in the New and Old Testaments 'imply separation and duality between spirit and matter, man and woman, heaven and Earth.' In addition she stresses that the duality was not in equal opposition, but is hierarchical. Judith Todd, 'On Common Ground: Native American and Feminist Spirituality Approaches in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth,' in Charlene Spretnak (ed.), The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement, Anchor Press, Garden City, New York, 1982, p. 431. See also Graham Harvey, Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 1997, p. 73.

51 It is suggested that Gothic cathedrals were regarded as 'the real image of the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which they were privileged to build on earth.' de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick, Gardner's Art through the Ages, p. 380.


53 Pollack, The Body of the Goddess, p. 152. Pollack is unusual in considering these changes in perceptions and meanings of the built environment.
An obvious example of disembodiment in patriarchal religions, which resulted in disconnection from the earth, is iconoclasm. Elinor Gadon discusses Hebrew iconoclasm and its prohibition of images that showed human likeness. For Goddess worship the embodiment of the deity was paramount. In contrast, the Hebrew God was invisible. According to Gadon, ‘He appeared to his people in the desert in a cloud and could not be discerned. Images may have been forbidden to assure their loyalty to the invisible Yahweh and to prevent their creating idols or adopting the idols of other peoples with whom they came into contact during the long years of exile.’ Gadon also contends that the Hebrews were iconoclastic in order to suppress Goddess worship. Of most relevance for this chapter is Gadon’s exploration of the implications of iconoclasm for the Goddess and the earth. She claims that

to prohibit the making of the Goddess image is to disembody her, to sever her from her life force, which is the earth. The embodiment of the Goddess in female form, with the procreative and sexual attributes of woman, is an important element of her effectiveness as a devotional instrument.

It can be inferred, therefore, that Goddess worship required a three-dimensional, embodied and immanent deity that was grounded and connected to the earth.

It is apparent that Goddess writers endeavour to contrast the religious myths of patriarchal religions, patriarchal philosophy, and artistic practices with Goddess religion as much as possible to highlight the differences in the two cultures. Some Goddess writers seek to find the reasons for and examples of these differences by looking at changes in society, particularly with regards to agricultural practice.

III. Revolutions in agriculture: implications for ecological relationships

Agricultural practices are an obvious area to analyse for insights into environmental damage. Despite references to patriarchal men raping the earth, Goddess writers tend to

57 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 184. Gadon mentions that Vedic India and the Protestant Reformation also partook in iconoclasm to suppress the Goddess. Very little other Goddess literature mentions disembodiment or iconoclasm. Rosemary Radford Ruether does discuss the iconoclasm of the Calvinist reformation.
58 An analysis of medieval art, sculpture, symbols and architecture would provide a wealth of information about the disembodiment of the immanent, embodied Goddess, as well as an insight into mediaeval attitudes to nature and the environment. This is an untapped source in Goddess literature.
59 Ironically, Goddess writers themselves promote dualistic thinking by contrasting every aspect of the two cultures to the extent that they do.
be quite unspecific about the method and chronology of harmful treatment of the earth by humans. General claims – such as the assertion that in a patriarchal mindset nature needed to be activated, harnessed, or forced into action by the pressure of a weapon or some other masculine power⁶⁰ – can be understood as an effort to mark a stark contrast with the balanced and harmonious ecological relationships represented in Goddess cultures of the Neolithic. References to agriculture in Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor’s work exemplify this approach. Such depictions refer to the patriarchal period in general and within this period tend to be ahistorical and trans-geographical. It is fascinating that Goddess writers predominantly ignore a wealth of evidence that highlights massive environmental degradation during the Neolithic period across Europe and this absence will be explored. As a result the main focus, for Starhawk at least, is the implications of the practice of enclosure in the early modern period.

Plough agriculture

Goddess writers have a radically different interpretation of the impact of the development of agriculture on the environment during the Neolithic than is generally held in archaeology and prehistory, and other perspectives – including the feminist. The Neolithic development of agriculture, as presented in textbook archaeology, is an obvious target for accusations of environmental destruction. Farming requires domination of the land and watercourses. In suitable conditions it sparks a chain of events – increased food supply, increased population, and the need for more land. In orthodox theory, the early farming societies have been presented as responding to land shortages by clearing virgin forests with a slash-and-burn technique.⁶¹

Some non-Goddess feminist writers find some practices in the Neolithic period to be catalysts for environmental problems. For instance, they attribute the crucial trigger of the changes in power relations between men and women and with nature to the change

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⁶⁰ Marija Gimbutas, for example, juxtaposes the Goddess-worshipping Neolithic society with the Kurgan invaders in her descriptions of the two cultures and notes that the invaders ‘believed that the touch of the axe blade awakened the powers of nature and transmitted the fecundity of the Thunder God; by the touch of His spear tip, the God of War and the Underworld marked the hero for glorious death.’ Marija Gimbutas, ‘Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe,’ in Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (eds), Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1989, p. 71.

⁶¹ In recent decades this theory has been challenged by archaeologists who argue that farmers did not work in a constant cycle of exhausting land, followed by clearing more land (that is, burning followed by cultivation followed by abandonment). See I.J. Thorpe, The Origins of Agriculture in Europe, Routledge, London & New York, 1996, pp. 31, 119–120. Even though more recent archaeological theories espouse less destructive methods (compared with the slash-and-burn farming) in Neolithic farmers’ use of land, it is still surprising that land and water use is absent in the Goddess mythistory.
in agricultural practices from small-scale to large-scale. The feminist archaeologist Margaret Ehrenberg and the feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, both connect the domination of animals by men with the introduction of the iron plough. Ehrenberg’s contention is that the iron plough allowed larger fields to be tilled and thus resulted in agriculture becoming a male domain, due to the increased distance of the practice from the home. Men’s relationship with the land and the animals that they yoked is presented as one of control and dominance, in contrast to the egalitarian relations between women and nature in the earlier stages of agriculture. Ruether concurs that plough agriculture is the turning point for power relations between the sexes and with nature, viewing it as ‘the tool of male dominance over animals and the land.’ In Ruether’s interpretation the development of plough agriculture is portrayed as internal to Neolithic culture, and it results in ‘a gender shift in agricultural production’, a new approach to land ownership, and a new attitude of male dominance over and ownership of animals. Ruether describes the changing relationships between humans and animals, which result from changes in agricultural practice, as follows: ‘[w]ild animals which are hunted retain their autonomy and freedom. Domesticated animals become an extension of the human family. But animals yoked and put to the plow, driven under the whip, are now in the [sic] new relation to humans. They are enslaved and coerced for their labor.’ In Ruether’s understanding hunting and even the domestication of animals are acceptable ways of treating animals. The interaction between humans and animals in these practices, she implies, was respectful, not with a power differential detrimental to the animals; the yoking of animals, however, is completely unacceptable. This practice exudes the worst kind of power differential and, according to Ruether, is analogous to human slavery.

62 See, for instance, Peggy Reeves Sanday’s description, which implies a causal relationship between male-centred practices, such as large-scale agriculture, and male dominance of women and nature, in Peggy Reeves Sanday, Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, paraphrased in Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 58.
64 Ruether, Gaia and God, p. 164. Like Christ, she is also influenced by Ehrenberg’s ideas. Ruether, for instance, remarks that ‘[w]hen plow agriculture was invented, by yoking cattle and using them to pull large digging tools, men were able to redefine both land and its products as belonging to them. Thus as Ehrenberg shows, between 6000 BCE and 2000 BCE we see several shifts that allow for the emergence of patriarchy. Before plow agriculture, plants and gardening are a female sphere. Once the plow pulled by cattle is invented, it is men only who are shown doing the plowing, as well as the milking of these animals.’ Ruether, Gaia and God, p. 164. Incidentally, Christ and Ruether cite the same pages from Ehrenberg’s book: pp. 99–107.
In general, Goddess writers ignore the above arguments. No mention of slash-and-burn techniques or forest clearing have arisen in Goddess literature and discussions of plough agriculture are limited and are most often approving. Starhawk, for example, explains that ‘[t]he introduction of the heavy plow in the Carolingian period had made it necessary for peasants to band together in order to acquire and maintain a plow and a team of oxen or horses needed to pull it.’\textsuperscript{68} The plough, therefore, allowed the village to work communally to plough large fields.\textsuperscript{69} In this interpretation, the plough promoted bonding and communal approaches to agriculture; there is no suggestion that it changed power relations to the detriment of women and nature.\textsuperscript{70} In contrast, Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor are critical of plough agriculture and male agricultural practices in general. For instance, they claim that ‘[g]enerally, when men took over control of agricultural work, developing the plough and other earth-working tools, they also began to develop ideas of the male as the cosmic generative principle.’\textsuperscript{71} In this perspective, the earth is devoid of any role in production. It becomes matter to be exploited by men, as Sjöö and Mor portray in the following sexual metaphor: ‘[p]loughing was experienced by men as rape of the Earth – the rape of dumb Matter by enlightened Spirit – and woman was as the humble furrow where proud man sows his seed.’\textsuperscript{72} Sjöö and Mor’s references to agriculture highlight the removal of women and the earth from any empowered position. Their descriptions of the earth are analogous to the experience of women. In their portrayal, as men conquered the earth, they also conquered women. Most Goddess writers do not highlight plough agriculture as being problematic for the environment because to do so would be to challenge their Goddess mythistory of the Neolithic Goddess societies in which women are credited with discovering agriculture in harmony with nature. Sjöö and Mor, however, view plough agriculture as a patriarchal invention, so it is not inconsistent in their particular representation to be critical of it.

\textsuperscript{68} Starhawk, \textit{Dreaming the Dark}, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{69} Starhawk, \textit{Dreaming the Dark}, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{70} Incidentally, Starhawk’s attitude is clearly influenced by the ecofeminist and historian of science Carolyn Merchant. Merchant does not view plough agriculture as causing the male domination of land and animals. She describes it as playing a role in the balanced mediaeval feudal agricultural system. Merchant, \textit{The Death of Nature}, pp. 43–44. She explains, for example, that ‘[t]he use of plow agriculture integrated crop planting with the raising of cows, pigs, and horses.’ Like ‘planting, harvesting, pasturing, and fencing’, ploughing was performed under the supervision of village officials, in order to maintain ‘the health of the ecosystem’. Merchant, \textit{The Death of Nature}, p. 44. Merchant, therefore, views plough agriculture in a completely different light to Ruether and Ehrenberg.
\textsuperscript{71} Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 62. Italics in original.
\textsuperscript{72} Sjöö and Mor, \textit{The Ancient Religion}, p. 62. Italics in original.
Regardless of their different perspectives, it is clearly not in the interest of Goddess writers to present plough agriculture as a major cause of the change in power relations because this would suggest that the change was intrinsic to internal conditions in the Goddess agricultural societies, rather than caused by external war-mongering patriarchal tribes. It is in the interests of the overall mythistory to stress external causes of the “Fall”. Goddess writers do, however, focus on agricultural practice and its implications for human relationships with nature in the early modern period.

Expropriation of the land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

In Goddess literature the disconnection of humans from their environment during the early modern period is attributed to a combination of factors including the witch persecutions and the new agricultural practice of enclosure, which was influenced by the scientific revolution and the emergence of capitalism. Goddess writers emphasise the survival of the Old Religion during at least the first millennium of Christianity in Europe, if only, in the end, on the margins of society. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, are presented as a pivotal period in which the Old Religion could no longer fend off the patriarchy’s ongoing attacks and inroads into villages and the countryside, with dire consequences for nature. Starhawk emphasises the events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because, of all history, she claims that this period was “a time when Western Culture underwent crucial changes that produced the particular brand of estrangement that characterizes the modern world.”

The following section will elucidate primarily Starhawk’s construction of this period, which she characterises as a horrific episode for women and the land, and the role of this epoch in the mythistory of the “Fall”. While other Goddess writers understand the early modern period to be horrendous – particularly in regard to the witch persecutions – Starhawk is exemplary in detailing the events and linking them to ecology. It will become apparent that her ideas are largely influenced by Carolyn Merchant and, as a result, many of her assertions would find support in early modern historiography.

Most relevant for this chapter is Starhawk’s emphasis on the expropriation of land caused by the change from the feudal system to enclosure, which developed in an atmosphere of emerging capitalism, as one of the primary undertakings that would

change the western world forever. According to Starhawk, before the introduction of enclosure areas such as forests were accessible to everyone. For example, she claims that ‘[a]lthough the local lord might be said to own a wood or pasture, the common people would have the right to graze cattle on the fallow fields, to run pigs in the forests, and to gather wood for fuel or for repairing buildings and fences.’ Consequently, peasants could supplement their resources from farming with produce from forests and fens. Starhawk stresses the benefits of the feudal system in its attitude towards the use of land as having an emphasis on subsistence rather than on profit. Country-dwellers not only had access to forests for practical reasons, but also for spiritual ones – it was where seasonal festivals were held, and in an increasingly suspicious society, where women could practise the Old Religion in secret, away from the gaze of the encroaching Christian priests. As a result, Starhawk suggests that the introduction of the practice of enclosure had huge implications, not only for peasants’ ability to subsist, but also on their ability to practise the Old Religion of nature worship.

As Starhawk explains, enclosure was a new scientific agricultural practice, as opposed to feudal agricultural practice, and it emerged with the rise of the market economy in which land was used to gain profit. The enclosure of land boosted the profit that could be made in a market economy. Furthermore, the change in land usage can be seen as part of the shift in understanding the land and village as a machine rather than an organism. Starhawk presents the practice of enclosure as being responsible for destroying peasants’ connections with the land and their entitlement to subsist from it. She contends that the major result of enclosure was to serve the needs of one rather than

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74 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 190.
75 Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 191. She explains, for example, that land ‘had value because it provided subsistence; this fact was the basis of its power to determine social standing. It supported armies, and was thus the base of political power. But it was not yet seen as a resource to be exploited for maximum gain.’
76 For instance, the most exportable and profitable commodities, such as wool, were produced most economically by enclosing land for farming sheep. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, pp. 192–193.
77 Starhawk describes the feudal society as being modelled on the metaphor of the human body. For example, quoting John of Salisbury (1159): ‘The lawmakers were its heart... Soldiers were its arms and hands... Financiers were the states’ bowels. Peasants, laborers, craftspeople and menial workers were the feet that supported all the rest.’ The complex system worked as an “organism”, hence the term “organicism” is used to describe the medieval social structure. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 189. Sjöö and Mor also pick up on the organic versus mechanic view of the world. They attribute it to Cartesian philosophy and the scientific revolution – for example: ‘[i]n the scientific revolution the theological mind/spirit and matter split was extended to the sciences. “Mind and Matter became two entirely separate spheres, one “alive” and one “dead”. This Cartesian division allowed “scientists” to treat matter as wholly inert “stuff” completely separate from themselves, and to see the material world as just so many different objects assembled into a huge machine.’ Sjöö and Mor, The Ancient Religion, p. 70.
many. She outlines the further disastrous ramifications for humans and animals as follows:

[When a forest was cut down and enclosed for grazing land, it no longer provided wood for fuel and building, acorns for pigs, a habitat for wild game, a source of healing herbs, or shelter for those who were driven to live outside the confines of town and village. When a fen was drained to provide farmland, it no longer provided a resting place or nesting sites for migratory birds, or a source of fish for the poor.]

As a result, enclosure affected most the people who relied on forests for extra produce to supplement their meagre livelihoods or for their entire subsistence. This is obviously an anthropocentric view of nature (as is primarily the case in Goddess literature): concern for nature because of the impact its destruction would have on humans. More particularly, though, Starhawk’s concern is more for a particular group of people – the peasant class.

As a result of agricultural changes, the community became segmented and decisions were made to suit and benefit landholders rather than the whole community. In addition, in Starhawk’s narrative, the witch persecutions contributed to the further fragmentation of the peasant community. Peasants became wary of one another and those with knowledge of the Old Religion became cautious about sharing it, lest they be accused of witchcraft. In fraught times people were accused of witchcraft as scapegoats. Furthermore, the demolition of forests meant that the peasants lost their sacred places for feasts and festivals, which contributed to them losing their customs, religion, and community bonds.

Starhawk’s interpretation of enclosure as disconnecting people from the land is an insightful one and would find support in the historiography of early modern Europe. According to historians of the early modern Agrarian Revolution, enclosure caused peasants to lose access and rights to common land, where they previously were able to,

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78 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 194.
79 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 194.
80 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 194.
81 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 196.
82 Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 196.
84 Starhawk explains that “[t]he sacred places and meeting grounds of the Old Religion were the wastes and forests that were now fenced off, cut down, or destroyed.” Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 197. Sjöö and Mor also show an awareness of the sense of community and security the feudal system provided peasants. Sjöö and Mor, *The Ancient Religion*, p. 71.
for instance, graze livestock, bake bread and chop wood. They acknowledge that with fencing off common land, peasants lost their sense of belonging, community and identity, and abandoned their traditional methods. Enclosure, therefore, had a disruptive effect on communities that had previously interacted on the common land. They had to seek employment elsewhere and work on land that they had had no sense of belonging to. The links that Starhawk makes between enclosure and capitalism are also relevant. Historians would support her linkage of enclosure with economics.

Starhawk, Sjöö and Mor discuss the changes that occurred in feudalism – for example, the transition from an organic worldview to a male-dominated mechanistic one. Starhawk’s narrative comes directly from the text *The Death of Nature* by the historian of science and ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant. Starhawk undoubtedly relies heavily on Merchant’s work for ideas and detail. Merchant and Starhawk do, however, employ different frameworks in their approaches to the early modern period. Merchant purposely approaches the early modern period as an ecosystem and explains that such a model presents an earth’s-eye view of history. Furthermore, she indicates that ‘[a]n ecosystem model of historical change looks at the relationships between the resources associated with a given natural ecosystem (a forest, marsh, ocean, stream, etc.) and the human factors affecting its stability or disruption over historical time periods.’ She is concerned, therefore, with how changes in human culture affected the environment and vice versa. Although Starhawk touches on the implications of enclosure for the land and animals, her emphasis is on how the land usage affected humans, particularly

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85 The historian of agricultural history Joan Thirsk defines enclosure as fencing or hedging an area of land ‘which has hitherto lain open, either in the arable fields, the meadows, or on common pastures.’ The practice restricts or extinguishes common rights of grazing over the land. Thirsk, *Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History*, p. 62. See also Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 16. The implications (positive and negative) of enclosure depend, however, on whether the practice is considered from an individual landowner’s perspective or from a commoner’s. On the one hand, for instance, enclosure gave the farmers more freedom in how they used the land. On the other hand, commoners could no longer graze their animals on the land in fallow seasons and at certain times of the year. Thirsk, *Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History*, p. 62. Obviously, in the Goddess mythistory the effect of enclosure is considered from peasants’ viewpoints and, therefore, is entirely negative.

86 McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, p. 16. Enclosure is perceived to have served individual interests over communal ones and to have caused an upheaval in the social and economic arrangements on manorial lands. McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, p. 42.

87 McRae points out that a common contemporary complaint about enclosure was that it led to the displacement of people and depopulation of an area. McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, pp. 16, 54.

88 See, for example, Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 238. She also relies on texts by the historian Christopher Hill such as *Reformation to Industrial Revolution: The Making of Modern English Society, Vol. 1: 1530–1780*, Pantheon, New York, 1967.


women, the poor and other marginalised groups. Merchant understands the changes from an organic subsistence community to capitalist economy as depending on the exploitation of natural resources. Starhawk understands the same changes more in terms of peasants’ lost access to the land and a subsequent loss of women’s status and of the Old Religion and its traditions.

An interesting observation in Starhawk’s narrative is the interconnection that she draws between the witch persecutions, the scientific revolution and the rise of capitalism. These changes resulted in women losing status as healers and holders of special knowledge, and in the earth being increasingly controlled and its naturalness and wildness, in the form of forests, tamed. The implications are that women, peasants, and wild nature were considered obstacles to progress unless they were controlled, tamed or exploited.

Conclusion

Overall, in the Goddess mythistory of the “Fall” ecological relationships are perceived to have survived in rural areas and among the peasant class, because it is in this location and among this class that daily interactions were required between humans and the land to ensure subsistence. Therefore, geography and class are determining factors of ecological consciousness. The corollary of survival in the countryside is that the destruction of ecological relationships occurred in urban areas, where the patriarchy dominated society, religion and philosophy. There are, however, inconsistencies in the Goddess mythistory, particularly in Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor’s depictions. Sjöö and Mor, for example, are scathing about agricultural practices, which would imply that they viewed interactions with the land throughout the mediaeval period as damaging.

To support their mythistory of survival during the “Fall” period (at least up until the early modern period), Goddess writers seek evidence, explicit and subtle, of pre-patriarchal Pagan symbols, traditions and practices of nature-worship that they allege were incorporated into the dominant religion of Christianity. At the same time, they highlight the new religion’s malign practices and differences, such as dualistic thinking (which condemns nature) and iconoclasm, to contrast it with the earlier nature-worshipping Goddess religion. The final blow to humans’ relationships with their

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91 Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 68.
surroundings is attributed to the early modern practice of enclosure, which dislocated peasants from their familiar local lands – the source of their identity, community and tradition.

A major conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that there is a stark contrast between the attention paid to ecology by Goddess writers in the “Golden Age” and the dearth of information available on the same theme for the period of the “Fall”. There is a noticeable absence of material from prominent Goddess writers, with the exception of Starhawk, and Sjöö and Mor. Starhawk’s comments on ecology, however, are mainly limited to a short section of an appendix in her book *Dreaming the Dark*. This contrast raises the question of why the emphasis on gender highlighted in Chapter Three does not correspond with a similar emphasis on ecological relationships in the texts analysed for this chapter. It seems that even when Starhawk, Carol Christ and others do acknowledge ecological changes they consider the effects of such changes on gender relations and certainly have a human-centred (particularly female-centred) approach. This lack of concern with nature in itself would support Susan Greenwood’s contention, in regard to contemporary British witchcraft, that practitioners are only superficially interested in the environment.\(^{92}\) I would contend, however, that it demonstrates that Goddess worshippers are essentially spiritual feminists first and foremost, and spiritual ecologists secondarily. Goddess worship, after all, stemmed from the broader atmosphere of second-wave feminism of which the primary preoccupations obviously concerned gender. I would suggest that Goddess worshippers’ interest in ecology was incorporated into their worldview later in its development from the cross-fertilisation that occurred between spiritual feminists and the broader movements of neo-Paganism and ecofeminism.

Scholars of neo-Paganism have observed that the neo-Pagan interest in ecology is a relatively new one that was not predominant in the 1970s.\(^ {93}\) In her extensive surveys of American neo-Pagans, Margot Adler found that an interest in ecological issues increased significantly in the late 1980s compared with her earlier surveys in the


The interest in ecological issues has increased exponentially in recent years. Another explanation for the lack of Goddess literature on ecology during the “Fall” could be that the sources available to Goddess writers did not suit their overall mythistory, so they chose to neglect the area altogether. This reason is clearly exemplified by Goddess writers in the way that most of them overlook plough agriculture in the Neolithic because of its incompatibility with their mythistory. This account pre-empts the next conclusion that not only is there a dearth of information in the Goddess literature, but that Goddess writers have fewer sources to draw from with regard to the theme of ecology, which results in them focusing on far fewer sources than they do for the theme of gender. With regard to gender, the Goddess writers have a large body of sources available from the broader movement of contemporary feminism. Second-wave feminists have drawn on earlier twentieth-century feminist writers, who, in turn, drew from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas of the Goddess and original matriarchal societies. With regard to ecology, in contrast, Goddess writers predominantly rely on texts from more recent decades. In recent years their texts have certainly been more eco-focused, but they are more reflective of contemporary concerns than with re-structuring their Goddess mythistory.

As it has become evident in this chapter, Starhawk has relied heavily on the work of Carolyn Merchant and other ecofeminists. It is not surprising that Goddess writers rely on ecofeminists, especially given that both movements connect the oppression of women and the denial of nature with male-dominated systems. While some ecofeminists may agree with Goddess writers’ understandings of the causes of oppression in general, they often disagree, particularly on the details of the “Fall”

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95 See Starhawk, *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature*, HarperSanFrancisco, New York, 2004; On her website, for example, Carol Christ discusses her concerns about the environment and reflects: "[d]espite the unseasonably "good" (warm) weather we have been having, I have felt a little sad and uneasy this fall. Could it be that my body knows what the earth body is suffering? ... I have vowed to do all that I can to save the wetlands of Kalloni, not because I believe that we can succeed in saving them for the birds (and ourselves), but because I know deeply within myself that it is right to try." Carol Christ, ‘Birdwatching in the Wetlands of Kalloni’ *Ariadne Institute*, <http://www.goddessariadne.org/birdwatching.htm> (accessed 30 August 2005). The recent publications are not, however, used in Chapters Five, Six and Seven because they are not concerned with notions of history.
narrative. Carolyn Merchant, for instance, pays little attention to changes in history that would affect the environment until the early modern period. For her the primary blame for humans’ denial of nature lies with the scientific revolution and capitalism. Despite differences in detail, the work of ecofeminists is often embraced by Goddess writers because of the core similarities and their need for sources to support their arguments. In this chapter the Goddess writers, particularly Starhawk, are more akin to social ecofeminists in their approach to the environment, being more concerned with class than gender with regard to the expropriation of land that occurred with the emergence of capitalism. This contrasts to the approaches in other chapters, in which Goddess writers’ interpretations can be positioned more explicitly within cultural ecofeminism.
Chapter Seven: The “Renaissance” of Goddess worship and the implications for ecological relationships

The Goddess gradually retreated into the depths of forests or onto mountaintops, where she remains to this day in beliefs and fairy stories. Human alienation from the vital roots of earthly life ensued, the results of which are clear in our contemporary society. But the cycles never stop turning, and now we find the Goddess reemerging from the forests and mountains, bringing us hope for the future, returning us to our most ancient human roots.


The Goddess is also earth – Mother Earth, who sustains all growing things, who is the body, our bones and cells. She is air – the winds that move in the trees and over the waves, breath. She is the fire of the hearth, the blazing bonfire and the fuming volcano; the power of transformation and change. And she is water – the sea, original source of life; the rivers, streams, lakes and wells; the blood that flows in the rivers of our veins. She is mare, cow, cat, owl, crane, flower, tree, apple, seed, lion, sow, stone, woman. She is found in the world around us, in the cycles and seasons of nature, in mind, body, spirit, and emotions within each of us. Thou art Goddess. I am Goddess. All that lives (and all that is, lives), all that serves life, is Goddess.


Introduction

In Goddess historiography, the scientific revolution, the emergence of capitalism, and the witch-hunts of early modern Europe dealt the final blows to the remnants of a worldview centred on the Goddess, women and nature. Since then patriarchal structures, inventions, philosophies and religions have dominated the western world. According to Goddess writers, in recent decades, however, the (re)emerging Goddess and nature-based religion have been offering alternative paths to a brighter future. To maintain the status quo is to continue with patriarchal dominance of women and exploitation of nature. To embrace Goddess worship, however, is to demand a revolution in attitudes towards, and treatment of, women and the earth.

The Goddess “Renaissance” period under consideration commences with the (re)emergence of Goddess worship in the final decades of the twentieth century and continues into the future.¹ At this stage, at the beginning of the twenty-first century,
Goddess worship is yet to make major inroads into patriarchal culture. Devotees, however, strive for change and live in hope of a future women-centred, nature-revering society in which the planet will be rejuvenated and ecological harmony achieved.

While demands for change in attitudes towards the environment and women have been ongoing in the Green and feminist movements, similar impassioned pleas abound within Goddess spirituality, contemporary witchcraft and other earth-based neo-Pagan religions. Elinor Gadon, for instance, claims that '[i]n the late twentieth century there is a growing awareness that we are doomed as a species and planet unless we have a radical change of consciousness. The re-emergence of the Goddess is becoming the symbol and metaphor for this transformation of culture.'2 Likewise, Riane Eisler makes a desperate call for change, with predictions of apocalyptic results if the warning is not heeded. To not change, she declares, will result in a 'nuclear or ecological holocaust'.3 Similarly, Pagans Morning Glory and Otter G'Zell prophesy the earth's end, unless significant change occurs. They stress that '[t]he only thing that can save us is a total and electrifying change of consciousness. ... We must become one with the Earth Mother in order to feel her pain/our pain and make it stop before the cancer we have become reaches the terminal phase.'4 Eisler calls for daring to break with patriarchal thought and systems at this precarious point in history. 'Poised on the brink of ecocatastrophe,' she proclaims, 'we gain courage to look at the world anew, to reverse custom, to transcend our limitations, to break free from the conventional constraints, the conventional views of what is knowledge and truth.'5

Full of optimism, Eisler finds the answers to the current maladies in the past. She believes that humans are responding to dire warnings by reclaiming attitudes that have been suppressed for millennia. She explains, for instance, that

[w]e see how the human thirst for creation rather than destruction, so long distorted and suppressed, is once again on the ascendancy, as women and

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men all over the world are reclaiming our most ancient consciousness – the consciousness of our oneness with one another and our Mother Earth.6

Inspiration from past Goddess cultures is Eisler’s solution. ‘Let us reconnect with our deepest spiritual roots,’ she requests, ‘so we may use modern technology not to destroy, exploit, and oppress but to free our unique human capacities to love and to create and to again live in partnership, rather than domination, with our miraculous planet, our Mother Earth.’7 The long distant past, of course, is everything the “Fall” period and the present are not. We are encouraged to develop a peaceful, egalitarian, nature-worshipping future modelled on the example of the past “Golden Age” of Goddess cultures. These pre-patriarchal societies are presented as revering women and the earth.8 To reclaim and gain inspiration from history, myth, rituals, and symbols from this period, therefore, is hailed as the answer to transforming the present situation. In attempting to (re)create a woman- and nature-focused culture, Goddess worshippers are endeavouring to recover a lost paradise and simultaneously demolish the patriarchal structures and myths on which our current western industrial society is based.

As pointed out in the Preface to Part Two above, Goddess worship can be seen as an instance of ecofeminism. Various beliefs that form the Goddess worldview are in accordance with the understandings of ecofeminist scholars: their attention to gender and ecology; their equation of women and nature and the view that the combination is empowering rather than enslaving; their understanding that the earth is living and its creatures (including humans) exist as one interconnected system. Ultimately, Goddess religion has the same aims as the Green movement and as ecofeminists – healthy relations between humans and nature. Differences appear, however, in methods. As discussed in the previous two chapters, criticisms of Goddess worship arise from within strands of ecofeminism concerning essentialism, anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. While the ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood supports the connection that Goddess writers draw between women and nature, she questions the relevance and necessity of the Goddess. For Plumwood there is no need for an

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6 Eisler, ‘The Goddess of Nature and Spirituality,’ pp. 20–21. This quote is interesting, in addition, because it shows that Eisler believes in a “Golden Age” that was followed by a “Fall” and that we now have the possibility of a “Renaissance”.

7 Eisler, ‘The Goddess of Nature and Spirituality,’ p. 21. Unlike most Goddess writers’ representations, Eisler’s world does include modern technology. In most visions of the future, technology is curiously absent; this pattern will be considered later in this chapter.

8 See Chapters Two and Five respectively.
intermediary to assure the connection between women and nature. For Goddess writers, Plumwood's critique amounts to heresy. It is precisely the Goddess that enables humans (particularly women) to find their empowering connection with nature.

This chapter will consider how Goddess writers construct the Goddess “Renaissance” with regard to ecology. It will elucidate their historical imaginary of this period and, in the process, highlight the important elements of this vision, such as the concept of immanence (that is, that the Goddess is immanent in the earth and nature), the concept that the world is alive, and the essentialist link between women and nature. It will reiterate the argument that a notion of history plays a crucial role in fostering worshippers’ connections to their religion. The ways in which worshippers connect to the Goddess and nature will be considered, including seasonal festivals, pilgrimages to sacred sites, as well as myths, rituals and symbols. To understand the context of its comparatively recent emergence, the movement will be considered in relation to the broader field of ecofeminism, and other theories, such as the Gaia hypothesis, will be assessed. To begin, the following section will elucidate the importance and role of the concept of immanence as the foundation of the Goddess mythistory of the “Renaissance”.

I. The importance of immanence for ecology in the Goddess “Renaissance”

The idea of an immanent deity is the foundation for the concept of interconnectedness; it evokes the idea that the earth is alive, and, most importantly, it drives the desired deconstruction of hierarchical dualistic thinking. As Elinor Gadon proclaims, ‘[t]he Goddess is reemerging as the harbinger of a new spiritual consciousness that sees humanity as part of the whole, part of the cosmos, and part of nature. This worldview holds that the divine is immanent and all that lives is sacred.’ The primary philosophical change demanded by contemporary Goddess worship, with the most far-reaching implications for women and the environment, is the shift from worshipping a transcendent God to revering an immanent Goddess. The divine, according to Charlene Spretnak, ‘is laced throughout the cosmic manifestations in and around us. The divine

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10 The concept of immanence is discussed in earlier chapters. It is reappears in this chapter because it is fundamental to the theme of ecology.
is immanent, not concentrated in some distant seat of power, a transcendent sky-god.12 Goddess writers agree on the nature and importance of immanence and repeatedly stress the idea that the Goddess is the earth and that every living thing is the Goddess.13 Diane Stein, for example, explains that

[as an embodiment of the universe, she [the Goddess] is usually seen as immanent, as the earth herself, and as present in every living thing from a blade of grass or a crystal to a wolf or a woman doctor. The Goddess is the earth and universe and everything that lives. She is present in all things and all living Be-ings [sic] are the Goddess-within, containing divinity in themselves. Anyone who is Goddess-within has consequence in the world, and that is everyone.14

Stein is a prime example of a Goddess writer accentuating the concept of immanence and its importance for ecological consciousness. Morning Glory and Otter G’Zell define the Goddess similarly and emphasise her physical presence in the earth and nature. They claim that

[i]n all the cultures where she is still worshiped, there is no confusion over her identity – she is Nature, and she is the Earth. She is not an atavistic abstraction, not a mystical metaphor, not a construct of consciousness. Her body is of substance as material as our own, and we tread upon her breast and are formed of her flesh.15

For Stein, Glory and G’Zell the Goddess is not merely an idea; she is reality and exists. As Starhawk explains, she is not simply a concept to be believed in. Starhawk makes an analogy between knowing rocks and knowing the Goddess. She points out that we do not believe in rocks – we can see and touch them, so we know them. Accordingly, the same can be said for the Goddess – we can know and connect with her. Starhawk observes that knowing a deity is a difficult concept for westerners, who are used to “believing” in a God.16

The most obvious consequence of an immanent deity is that, if every living thing is considered to be sacred, the environment would be respected, revered and even

13 See, for example, the opening quote of this chapter by Starhawk. Refer also to Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, p. 233.
15 Glory and G’Zell, ‘Who on Earth Is the Goddess?’, p. 27.
16 Starhawk explains that ‘[i]t is extremely difficult for most Westerners to grasp the concept of a manifest deity. The phrase “believe in” itself implies that we cannot know the Goddess, that She is somehow intangible, incomprehensible. But we do not believe in rocks – we may see them, touch them, dig them out of our gardens, or stop small children from throwing them at each other. We know them; we connect with them. In the Craft, we do not believe in the Goddess – we connect with Her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. She is within us all. She is the full circle: earth, air, fire, water, and essence – body, mind, spirit, emotions, change.’ Starhawk, The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1979, pp. 77-78. Italics in original.

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celebrated. The concept of immanence also precipitates the idea that everything is interconnected. Starhawk, for example, explains that ‘[w]hen we understand that the Earth itself embodies spirit and that the cosmos is alive, then we also understand that everything is interconnected.’ Furthermore, according to Starhawk, it follows that an interconnected environment is a community. She contends that a religion based on the principles of immanence, interconnection and community expects its followers to take action. This form of spirituality, therefore, is a practical rather than an intellectual philosophy. When people realise that the earth and cosmos are alive and sacred, then they desire to care for it and are expected to do so. This type of spirituality makes demands on its followers and the possibility of change hinges on devotees fulfilling their responsibilities and obligations.

Another implication of the concept of immanence for ecology is the deconstruction of hierarchical dualistic thinking, so fundamental to patriarchal philosophies. What would normally occupy the bottom rung in patriarchal thinking and be given a negative value, such as women/nature/body/flesh, is no longer suppressed or deemed to be evil or sinful. Goddess worshippers embrace and identify with the categories such as nature, which are rejected in patriarchal thinking, and find empowerment in doing so. Starhawk describes the non-dichotomous thinking of Goddess worship, as follows:

	"[t]he craft is earth religion, and our basic orientation is to the earth, to life, to nature. There is no dichotomy between spirit and flesh, no split between Godhead and the world. The Goddess is manifest in the world; she brings life into being, is nature, is flesh. Union is not sought outside the world in some heavenly sphere or through dissolution of the self into the void beyond the senses. Spiritual union is found in life, within nature, passion, sensuality – through being fully human, fully one’s self."

In this interpretation, as the Goddess is nature, it follows that the spiritual and earthly realms are considered to be one and inseparable.

Another example of the perceived results of non-dualistic thinking is the dissipation of dichotomous thinking with regard to life and death. In Goddess thinking death is as
important as birth and is considered to be a necessary stage in the cycle of life. Gloria Orenstein, for instance, explains that

[i]n all of these living systems the Earth is the Mother, both of life and of death, but death is not viewed as a negative state or as the void within an ecological perspective where all living matter is recycled and reborn. Death is merely one phase of a vaster process of life, death, and regeneration. All of this is seen as part of a web of interconnectedness, part of the cycles of seasons, of day and night, of solstices and equinoxes, of the tides, the phases of the moon, and the menses in women.21

Similarly, Helen Berger observes that in the Goddess worldview ‘[l]ife and death are seen as interdependent aspects or parts of one whole, as all life is dependent on death.’22 For instance, if killing occurs to provide food, enabling life to continue, then it is not deemed to be evil.23 Likewise, Starhawk emphasises that killing only occurs to ensure the cycle of life. She contends that

[l]ove for life in all its forms is the basic ethic of Witchcraft. Witches are bound to honor and respect all living things, and to serve the life-force. While the Craft recognized that life feeds on life and that we must kill in order to survive, life is never taken needlessly, never squandered or wasted.24

This view sits in stark contrast to so-called patriarchal attitudes to killing, in which it is even, in some contexts, regarded as a sport.

Encompassing everything, the Goddess is, therefore, the dark and the light, death and life, bodily functions and the soul.25 In this philosophy she is manifest in all living things, including diseases and flu viruses – elements of existence that are considered malign in patriarchal thinking.26 Rachel Pollack, for example, explains that ‘we also find Her body in disease, and death, for these are not mistakes, or punishments, but are

25 Starhawk states this view in the following excerpt: ‘[t]he Goddess is first of all earth, the dark, nurturing mother who brings forth all life. She is the power of fertility and generation; the womb, and also the receptive tomb, the power of death. All proceeds from Her; all returns to Her. As earth, She is also plant life; trees, the herbs and grains that sustain life. She is the body, and the body is sacred. Womb, breast, belly, mouth, vagina, penis, bone, and blood – no part of the body is unclean, no aspect of the life processes is stained by any concept of sin. Birth, death, and decay are equally sacred parts of the cycle. Whether we are eating, sleeping, making love, or eliminating body wastes, we are manifesting the Goddess. The Earth Goddess is also air and sky, the celestial Queen of Heaven, the Star Goddess, ruler of things felt but not seen: of knowledge, mind, and intuition. She is the Muse, who awakens all creations of the human spirit. She is the cosmic lover, the morning and evening star, Venus, who appears at the times of love-making. Beautiful and glittering, She can never be grasped or penetrated; the mind is drawn ever further in the drive to know the unknowable, to speak the inexpressible. She is the inspiration that comes with an indrawn breath.’ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 78.
part of existence.' Having an immanent deity, therefore, in this perspective, does not rid the world of disease or danger. Harvey reflects that the dictum that "everything that lives is holy" does not mean that Nature is a rose without thorns. The Earth is a dangerous place to live, as full of death as it is of life. Perilous moments are, therefore, all a part of the cycles of life.

An outcome of the concept of immanence is a commitment to diversity, albeit in a broad ecological sense. Starhawk, for instance, refers to diversity as being necessary for the survival of all species and the environment. She explains that '[s]erving the life-force means working to preserve the diversity of natural life, to prevent the poisoning of the environment and the destruction of species.' Furthermore, she contends that '[a] matrifocal culture, based on nature, celebrates diversity, because diversity assures survival and continuing evolution. Nature creates thousands of species, not just one; and each is different, fitted for a different ecological niche.' Starhawk, however, is unusual in discussing diversity and it needs to be stressed that she has primarily covered this topic in relation to species, rather than in relation to gender and ethnic difference.

The concept of immanence is fundamental to a worldview that respects and connects with nature, the earth and their cycles. In philosophical terms, it deconstructs dualistic thinking, thereby accepting that all elements have a role in the earthly cycles of life. The following section will consider how humans connect to the Goddess and nature through aligning themselves with her cycles, connecting with her at specific locations, as well as through rituals and symbols.

28 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, p. 133.
31 In the early years of feminist spirituality the movement was criticised for catering for white middle class women and for excluding women of colour and from different classes and backgrounds. The movement also has been accused of appropriating elements of, for example, indigenous American ritual and practices. Some practitioners, such as Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, have acknowledged these criticisms and endeavoured to reconsider their focus in recent years. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, 2nd ed., HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1992, pp. viii–ix.
II. The earth's cycles, sacred sites and rituals: connecting to and celebrating nature

If the Goddess is alive and revered as the earth, then it follows that the earth's cycles will be acknowledged and celebrated. Connecting to and celebrating the earth's cycles, through festivals, sites, rituals and symbols, is a fundamental practice in Goddess worship. The earth's cycles indeed mark the annual calendar of festivals for Pagans. In a non-institutionalised religion, without an authoritative body or a liturgical book, the seasons, and the festivals that mark them, provide a sense of connection. It is fitting that for a worldview that reveres nature the movement's structure is determined by the earth and its cycles. This section argues that the seasonal festivals of the Goddess “Renaissance” are inspired by history, specifically the Goddess mythistory of Pagan festivals in the “Golden Age”.

In the Goddess optic, festivals and pilgrimages to sacred sites provide the time, space and ambience for worshippers to (re)connect to pre-patriarchal times and their ancestors. Worshippers connect to a past time by being in a particular physical space. It will become clear that Goddess worshippers take an active, embodied approach to their spirituality by connecting with, celebrating, acknowledging and knowing the earth and its inhabitants through festivals, rituals, and pilgrimages to sacred sites. Theirs is an embodied way of being in and experiencing the world.

The earth’s cycles

In the contemporary context Pagan practitioners celebrate and show gratitude for the earth and nature – as well as connecting with their friends, family, the Goddess, and the earth – through festivals that are marked by the important stages in the earth’s and moon’s cycles. Goddess writers commonly claim that their annual calendar of festivals is based on pre-Christian Pagan seasonal events. Charlene Spretnak, for instance, explains that

32 See this chapter’s opening quotation by Starhawk where she explains that the Goddess is found ‘in the cycles and seasons of nature.’
33 Charlene Spretnak, for instance, explains that ‘[t]oday the solstices and equinoxes have become occasions for groups of friends and family to gather in celebration of the Earth community and to focus awareness on the particular turning of the seasons. With friends, I have given thanks at autumn equinox for the bountiful harvests of the soil and in our lives, turned inward on the long night of winter solstice to look directly at the dark, known regeneration at spring equinox as Earth’s exuberance burst forth, and felt the fullness of fruition at summer solstice when Earth’s day is long and sensuous.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 267.
[The two days with the longest and shortest gift of light from our sun, plus the two days with light and darkness of equal length, plus the midpoint days between those four were celebrated in pre-Christian Europe as natural markers in the majestic cycles of Earth's body (two of the midpoint holy days being preserved in modern times as May Day and All Saints Day, or All Hallows Day, preceded immediately by Hallows Eve, or "Halloween").

In her research on the festival of Halloween, the folklorist Leila Dudley Edwards found that "Pagans emphasise the continuity of the tradition, relating the festival to a pre-Christian society more synchronised with the cycles of nature." Dudley discovered that "the majority of individuals emphasised the importance of remembering the ancestors, the ancient peoples of the land who lived in close accordance with nature." Furthermore, she adds, they exclude "[t]he Christian interlude with its focus on All Saints." There is, therefore, a conscious retrieval of traditions from pre-Christian times and an exclusion of Christian traditions. Foremost, the festivals are a time for devotees to contemplate the cycles and in doing so they, presumably, remember the same poignant issues that their ancestors faced in pre-Christian, pre-patriarchal times, thus enabling the contemporary Pagan practitioners to connect with their ancient pre-patriarchal predecessors, who, likewise, are perceived to have revered nature. Another advantage of a religion perceived to have ancient roots is that it serves to give their practice more authenticity, as well as a sense of history and tradition.

Practitioners also gain a further connection to nature in the comparisons that they find between women's and nature's cycles, such as between the lunar and menstrual cycles. Elinor Gadon describes women's coven meetings as "[a] solemn and meditative occasion" in which "women get in touch with the mysteries within their bodies that are in rhythm with the movement of the universe." Rachel Pollack points out that the moon's cycles and women's menstrual cycles are of similar duration and that women living in close quarters often menstruate at the same time and often during the full or

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36 Edwards, 'Tradition and Ritual,' p. 237. She adds that '[s]ome pagans formally invite the Dead to their ritual, others remember specific individuals and commune with them. Other important reasons for celebration include giving thanks for the renewal and regeneration of nature and being aware of the cycles of the earth.'
38 As Orenstein affirms, '[h]onoring the Great Mother by celebrating the Earth and Her cycles has also given contemporary meaning to the solstice and equinox rituals performed by ancient and modern earth-revering and tribal peoples everywhere.' Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, p. 112.
40 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 236.
new moon. More subtle links are also described between the lunar cycle and women’s life cycle. Goddess writers, for example, perceive the moon’s three distinct phases in its cycle (waxing, full and waning) to reflect women’s three life-stages of maiden, mother and crone. Starhawk evocatively implies connections between women’s and lunar cycles in the following excerpt:

[the celestial Goddess is seen as the moon, who is linked to women’s monthly cycles of bleeding and fertility. Woman is the earthly moon; the moon is the celestial egg, drifting in the sky womb, whose menstrual blood is the fertilizing rain and the cool dew; who rules the tides of the oceans, the first womb of life on earth. So the moon is also Mistress of Waters: the waves of the sea, streams, springs, the rivers that are the arteries of Mother Earth; of lakes, deep wells, and hidden pools, and of feelings and emotions, which wash over us like waves.

There is an obvious absence of men in all of these descriptions of connections with nature. This vision is unashamedly focused on the essentialist link between women and nature.

Celebrating the earth’s cycles is to follow the waxing and waning of the earth’s fertility. At certain times, for example in spring, fertility is emphasised. At other times, such as during winter, the earth’s fertility is acknowledged for being dormant. Overall, as Graham Harvey explains, the seasonal festivals are an important time for Pagans to ‘renew their relationships and deepen their intimacy with their environment, Nature.’

Sacred sites and pilgrimages

In Goddess worship, an important way of connecting with nature, the Goddess, and the pre-patriarchal past is to celebrate festivals and to perform rituals at sacred sites.

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42 Starhawk, for instance, explains that ‘[t]he Moon Goddess has three aspects: As She waxes, She is the Maiden; full, She is the Mother; as She wanes, She is the Crone.’ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 78. See also: Pollack, *The Body of the Goddess*, pp. 18–19.
43 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 78.
44 As Helen Berger portrays in her discussion of the vernal equinox, also known as Ostava and considered by Pagans to be the New Year (March 21, the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere): ‘[a]t the Ostava rituals, chocolate rabbits and dyed eggs are traditionally distributed as symbols of fertility – fertility of thoughts and actions, even more than fertility of crops and animals. There is on the whole a deemphasis on human fertility. At a recent Ostava ritual I attended, energy was raised for the purpose of increasing the fertility of endangered species, such as whales.’ Berger, *A Community of Witches*, p. 16.
45 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, p. 126. Harvey adds that ‘[t]hey are confronted not with the demands and claims of a “spiritual” after-life or deity, but with the significance of everyday life on Earth. Birth, growth, sexuality, fecundity, creativity, death, decay, vitality, beginnings, endings, joy, sadness and other mundane, everyday, ordinary affairs are found to be meaningful and sacred. ... but Pagans celebrate the festivals with the much simpler understanding that they are honouring the seasons and the land. Pagan calendar celebrations are about time and space: this time – the present, now – and this space, here. They encourage and inculcate an awareness of being “at home” here and now in the mundane and therefore sacred Earth. The festivals teach ecology.’
Goddess worshippers make pilgrimages to particular locations. Simply being in certain landscapes is believed to foster a religious experience and connection to the Goddess. For Carol Christ, for example, being in a particular location enabled her to remember and (re)create the past. She reflects:

At Delphi, I bathe my hair in the spring of Canathus and chew a laurel leaf as the prophetess was said to have done. ... As my eyes adjust, I see that I am in an enormous room filled with folded stalagmite shapes emerging and receding in the cave’s wet darkness. “The Shape Shifter,” I think ... I sit on the floor of the cave looking out to the light, and I feel myself become a woman grinding seeds while children play before her. “If you had eyes like the stones, you could explore the universe ... Yes, you could go back to ancient times.”

Here Carol Christ imagines her way into ancient times and becomes, fleetingly, a woman in an egalitarian, peaceful society. The sites, such as Delphi, are believed to have been sacred in ancient times, so simply to be there, in the physical landscape, gives worshippers a link to the past. Pollack points out how being present at a site can bring history into contemporary experience. She explains that ‘[h]onoring our own experiences at sacred places enables us (including those with whom we share our stories) to overcome the split between history and life.’ The fact that the physical sites are still in existence suggests that they, and their associated histories and myths, are eternal.

In addition to connecting contemporary worshippers to the past, certain landscapes give the deity ‘a physical reality’. Embodiment of the Goddess in the landscape is captivating and gives the worshipper something to see, to touch, to know, to love, and to protect. According to Elinor Gadon, when artist Judith Anderson, for example, was at Avebury,

she saw the Goddess rising from the landscape like a giant monolith, her body encompassing the structures in which the rituals of her life were enacted. .... Walking among the stones she was struck by the silence, the awesome mystery of her body in the landscape, and by the eternal presence of the ruins.

Pollack describes pilgrims’ experiences in Goddess temples on Malta and recounts that they felt ‘an overwhelming sense of protection, even love’ on this island. A deity with physicality also seems to enable women to reflect on their own physicality, and,

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46 See Chapter Four, page 144, footnote 101, for a description of the concept of pilgrimage.
50 Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, pp. 346, 349.
51 Pollack, The Body of the Goddess, p. 16.
significantly, to do so in an affirming way. Pollack, for example, reflected on her experience at a sacred site. She explains:

when I read more about the caves [prehistoric caves], I found it natural, as so many others have, to compare them to the inside of my own body. And when I and a friend visited the cave of Pech-Merle, with its huge tunnels and chambers, and its walls dripping red, both of us (independently) felt like microbes inside a gigantic body.\(^{52}\)

On a trip to the Roman baths in the city of Bath in England, Pollack observed connections between water and women's bodies.\(^{53}\) She explains that when she watched 'the steaming waters pour out from a large hole in the native rock', her guide, the Pagan writer Marian Green, informed her 'that the water was tinted red, from iron deposits in the stone, and that the combination of heat and redness produced an intense image of birth waters surging from the womb of the Earth.'\(^{54}\) As women's bodies and cycles have been considered unclean in patriarchal times, to view the manifestation of the earth's birthing waters, for instance, must be incredibly empowering for women. Such affirming imagery of the earth could lead women, through analogy, to embrace and celebrate their own bodies. Pollack goes on to add: 'Later, I visited Glastonbury, where the spring also flows red. And I read that many cathedrals were built on ancient pagan sites, which in turn were built over underground streams.'\(^{55}\) Pollack draws connections between streams tinged red and menstrual blood; between water and sacred sites; between nature and women.

For some Goddess worshippers the sites do not continue to exist solely because they are physically still in existence, but because they emit a spiritual presence; that is, they are topophilic. Pollack explains that '[t]he Goddess has both a visible and an invisible body. The visible is whatever is physical and substantial. The invisible comes into being as whatever is real, but cannot be touched. The invisible includes such aspects as imagination, desire, and thought.'\(^{56}\) Elinor Gadon describes artists as being inspired by the dormant energies in the great megalithic mounds.\(^{57}\) If the energies or spirit of the place are dormant then there is a real possibility of return. The sites may again become places of mystique, magic and the sacred.

\(^{57}\) Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 346.
Some artists and architects have attempted to create contemporary sacred sites modelled on and inspired by Neolithic design. Sculptor Christina Biaggi and architect Mimi Lobell designed a temple embodying the Goddess, based on a megalithic structure, to 'reanimate the consciousness of architecture as a habitable structure in harmony with the environment.' Biaggi describes her aims as follows:

[s]culpture in the Western world has lost the mystical magical presence that it had during the Neolithic period when a temple or a sculpture was considered to be the body of the deity. In creating my sculpture, I wish to bring back some of this magic and mystery. I want to create a space that inspires mystery; that evokes the dark caves of the Goddess - places of rebirth and revitalized consciousness.

Biaggi is inspired by the past and endeavours to (re)create a space in which worshippers can experience the oneness and sacredness of the deity and the environment.

All sacred sites mentioned so far, with the exception of the spa in Bath, are situated in quintessential rural landscapes. Elinor Gadon explains that most women's rituals are held 'out-of-doors in a rustic setting in the majestic moonlight.' Given that Goddess worship is an earth-based religion, it is unsurprising that urban devotees choose to meet outside, in a forest, or at a rural sacred site. Diane Purkiss, however, finds it inconsistent that most practitioners live in urban areas 'yet most rituals, portrayals of deities and spells draw on images of a halcyon countryside and a festive rural year.' Purkiss criticises contemporary Goddess worshippers for romanticising the countryside and for ignoring the reality of environmental degradation. For example, she observes that their countryside has no agrochemicals; it is, rather, pre-industrial. Purkiss points out that the rituals are unrealistic in alleging that '[t]he rhythms of urban life are almost never incorporated into invocations, rituals or spells; what is celebrated is a rural calendar which does not exist in the countryside either, and never really did. This idealised rural cycle floats free of any need to worry about drought, early frost or disease.' While Purkiss makes a valid point, it is not surprising that contemporary Pagan rituals do not reflect reality, the real countryside or current times. Goddess worshippers desire to return to or (re)create a past time, so imagine this time - their own

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60 Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, p. 236.
image of the past – in ritual, hoping that they can in some way (re)produce it in reality in the future. The countryside that Purkiss describes is the patriarchal countryside, not the one that would exist in a Goddess culture.

Myths, ritual and symbols

At the seasonal festivals and coven meetings the earth is celebrated through myth, ritual and symbols. Myths are narrated in a ritualised sacred space and symbols represent the Goddess and elements of nature. According to Starhawk, rituals are fundamental to the Goddess’s continuing existence. She explains that ‘[t]he Goddess is immanent, but She needs human help to realize her fullest beauty. The harmonious balance of plant/animal/human/divine awareness is not automatic; it must constantly be renewed, and this is the true function of Craft rituals.’ Rituals involve visualisations in which women imagine that they are embodying nature or the Goddess. Songs and chants also assist practitioners to identify with nature. The British Wiccan priestess Vivianne Crowley claims, for instance, that chanting and drumming have increased in popularity in Wiccan rituals since the 1980s.

Another important way for practitioners to connect to the Goddess and nature, and to the ancient woman-centred/nature-based societies and their myths, is through symbols.

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64 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, pp. 11–12.
65 One of Starhawk’s favourite visualisations is the following: ‘[b]reathe deeply, from your belly. Let yourself stand loosely but firmly planted on the earth. Straighten your spine, and release the tension in your shoulders. Now imagine that your spine is the trunk of a tree that has roots that go deep into the center of the earth. Let yourself breathe down into those roots, and let all the tensions and worries you bring with you flow down with your breath and dissolve into the earth.’ Starhawk, ‘Ritual as Bonding: Action as Ritual,’ in Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (eds), *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989, p. 327. This visualisation supposedly enables and encourages practitioners to identify with nature.
66 Vivianne Crowley, ‘Healing in Wicca,’ in Wendy Griffin (ed.), *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment*, AltaMira Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 161. The following chant stresses interconnection, mutual interdependence, respect and protection between humans and nature: ‘[t]he Earth is our Mother, We will take care of her. Mother Earth carry me, Thy child I will always be.’ Vivianne Crowley, ‘Women and Power in Modern Paganism,’ in Elizabeth Puttick and Peter B. Clark (eds), *Women as Teachers and Disciples in Traditional and New Religions*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, 1993, p. 128. Another chant that links the body to the natural world, encouraging and fostering humans to identify with nature, is: ‘Earth my body, Water my blood, Air my breath and Fire my spirit’. Crowley, ‘Healing in Wicca,’ p. 161. Nature is simultaneously part of the human body and an extension of it. It follows, therefore, that to heal the earth is to heal the body and vice versa. Crowley, ‘Healing in Wicca,’ p. 161. The end of Charlie Murphy’s folk song “The Burning Times” evokes the idea of mother earth as the provider of every need for everyone: ‘Now the Earth is a Witch and the men still burn her, Stripping her down with mining and the poisons of their wars; yet to us the Earth is a healer, a teacher, a mother, she’s the weaver of a web of life which keeps us all alive.’ Charlie Murphy quoted in Crowley, ‘Healing in Wicca,’ p. 161. Vivianne Crowley says that the song “The Burning Times” is frequently sung at Wiccan gatherings. Crowley, ‘Healing in Wicca,’ p. 161.
Z. Budapest encourages practitioners to place symbolic items on an altar. She points out that

> every house used to have an altar, for the house spirits, for the ancestors. Every woman would do well to have one of her own. On it, you represent the Goddess in some symbolic manner – by a rose, for instance, or any flower, because all that is green, all that grows above the earth, is sacred to Persephone. … Take the salt and put it down in front of your altar on the floor and stamp on it. The salt here symbolizes the salt of the earth – wisdom – so you are standing on your wisdom. And the water represents Aphrodite; there is no organic life without water, it is the life force.

In Budapest’s description of an altar the devotee connects to nature, to the Goddess (because she is represented by symbols from nature) and to the past. Spretnak also describes the simple yet powerful symbolism of objects on an altar. Even a passing glance at the symbolic forms of the Goddess reminds a woman that she is heir to a lineage of deeply grounded wisdom and inner strength and a weaver of the sacred whole. It is also a reminder of times when they were empowered. Spretnak accentuates the power of a figurine; simply glancing at a symbol can be empowering and can connect the viewer to the strengths of her ancestors of the “Golden Age”. She goes on to emphasise, particularly, the power of the Minoan Goddess figurine. She reflects that

> in many women’s altars “the little snake Goddesses of Crete,” their names long lost, stand as we moderns never could have imagined: planted firmly on the earth, baring breasts proudly, their out-stretched arms hold writhing serpents, symbols of shedding and growth in endless regeneration. We sustain the mythic presence of the Goddess in our lives as She evokes our creativity and depth.

Spretnak discusses the importance of totems in evoking myth and claims that myths fade if they are distant from a totemic presence. This idea then stresses the important role of symbols on an altar and in a ritual circle, as well as the importance of ritual.

The celebration of nature’s cycles is an important aspect of Goddess spirituality. The cycles are celebrated in seasonal festivals inspired by history and myth, and with rituals

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68 For instance, she claims that ‘[m]any who follow this path assemble a home altar bearing symbols of the Goddess. It may be no more than a shelf in a bookcase covered with a cloth on which stand Goddess figurines, shells, stones, or other gifts of the Earthbody, but its effective power is remarkable.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 275.


72 Spretnak is also implying that the language in a myth is itself important. She explains, for instance, that ‘[i]n the sacred stories of the Goddess – replete with totemic serpents, deer, owls, spiders, bear, and more – the body of the Goddess is itself a totemic presence.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 276.
full of ancient symbolism and nature imagery. In celebrating all of the elements of the life cycle a perceptual shift occurs, as Spretnak explains, ‘from the death-based sense of existence that underlies patriarchal culture to a regeneration-based awareness, an embrace of life as a cycle of creative rebirths, a dynamic participation in the processes of infinity.’

III. Links with the broader ecofeminist movement

While the second wave of feminism was questioning patriarchal institutions in the 1960s, the ecology movement was emerging and proclaiming that the human use of nature was causing pollution and the destruction of natural systems. Some feminists and ecologists found links between the two movements, as both groups attributed their concerns, sexist oppression and environmental degradation, to patriarchal structures and systems. In 1974 the French writer Françoise d’Eaubonne coined the term “écofeminisme” and Ynestra King further articulated the concept, “Eco-feminist Imperative”, in a collection published in 1983. Various views exist within the movement of ecofeminism. On the one hand, radical, cultural and spiritual ecofeminists (re)claim a social, biological or spiritual connection between women and nature. These ecofeminists embrace the woman–nature connection and use it as a source of empowerment. As Marlene Longenecker explains,

[...]or some, the fact of women’s procreative capacity is itself the source of a biological tie with nature’s life-giving processes; for others, the fact that women have for so long been associated with nature gives us a unique opportunity to shape the relationship for the empowerment of both; for still others, the association with nature is a more metaphorical (“Mother” Nature, “mother earth”) but equally powerful source of what they see as their moral call to stewardship and protection of the environment.

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On the other hand, liberal and social ecofeminists criticise this position as essentialist and advocate the deconstruction of the nature–woman equation.\textsuperscript{78}

During the 1970s numerous feminist thinkers and theologians, such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, began to critique the sexist structures of the dominant religions at the same time as ecofeminists, such as Carolyn Merchant and Susan Griffin, were linking the exploitation of women and nature.\textsuperscript{79} As was concluded in the previous chapter, ecology was not Goddess worshippers' primary concern, although cross-fertilisation with ecofeminists occurred naturally, due to Goddess religion being an earth-based spirituality. Starhawk, for example, claims witchcraft to be a 'religion of ecology'.\textsuperscript{80} Margot Adler describes neo-Paganism as a religion, and a way of life, that celebrates the interrelationships between living things and the environment that are studied in ecology.\textsuperscript{81} While the Green movement has been calling for a paradigm shift to prevent the destruction of the earth since the 1970s, women's spirituality groups have been making a similar demand. The two movements may find inspiration in different places, but they ultimately both desire a healthy, sustainable, and harmonious environment.

Spiritual ecofeminism is credited with influencing the broader movement, especially through the way in which it mobilises people in a ritual setting during protests and political actions. The broader movement is also influential in spiritual ecofeminism. Vivianne Crowley points out that the social movements of the 1970s have changed neo-Paganism, particularly Wicca, making it more radical and concerned about the environment. Crowley claims that '[t]he transition is significant. Wicca had moved out of the darkness, the occult world of witchery, to occupy the moral high ground – environmentalism. To be at one with nature in one’s inner self is no longer enough; radical action to preserve nature is now important.'\textsuperscript{82} She adds that 'Wicca is undergoing a transition from an esoteric occult tradition to a more open exoteric movement with environmentalism high on the agenda.'\textsuperscript{83} Being based in Britain,

\textsuperscript{78} Longenecker, 'Women, Ecology,' p. 2.
\textsuperscript{79} Roger S. Gottlieb, introductory material in Gottlieb (ed.), \textit{This Sacred Earth}, p. 320.
\textsuperscript{80} Starhawk, 'Witchcraft as Goddess Religion,' p. 52.
\textsuperscript{83} Crowley, 'Wicca as Nature Religion,' p. 179.
Crowley has noticed the influence from the USA. Starhawk’s approach, in particular, has changed the interpretation of Wicca in Britain. Mary Jo Neitz has noticed similar changes and remarks that ‘[t]he 1980s have witnessed changes within the neopagan community itself: more explicit political activity directed toward ecological issues, nuclear issues, feminist concerns and gay and lesbian issues.’ Diane Purkiss understands the contemporary focus on environmental issues to be a civil rights issue. She explains that

they [modern witches] see environmental issues as civil rights issues, the right to breathe clean air, and to bring up children in a green countryside rather than in a grey urban wasteland, to see animals instead of lorries. This connection has been made possible because many modern witches have cut their political teeth defending their own freedom to practise a religion of nature worship.

As such, Purkiss’s point, in fact, highlights how the attitudes towards nature are anthropocentric. Despite nature imagery being entwined in myths and symbols, Goddess worshippers’ consideration of nature and the environment is usually from a female perspective and neglects a perspective from nature, unlike a Deep ecologist’s approach.

Spiritual ecofeminism, such as Goddess worship, receives criticism from the broader movement of ecofeminism and even from within neo-Paganism. Some writers and practitioners criticise the movement for being only superficially concerned with ecology. Anthropologist and practitioner Susan Greenwood, for example, argues that contemporary British witchcraft ‘is more focused on “inner nature” and the power to define the self rather than “external nature” or the environment.’ She disagrees with modern Pagans who believe that their practices ‘are re-creations of ancient indigenous Pagan religions’ and claims that

modern witchcraft is less a nature religion in its own right than a development of high magic, which in its later years, since the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, has developed as a result of inner rather than external nature, the focus being on personal spiritual transformation and growth in association with the natural world rather than the worship of “nature” as such.

Having studied American contemporary Paganism, Margot Adler suggests that contemporary Pagans' interest in ecology is more a part of their self-image than what they actually practise. In the same study, however, Adler states that Starhawk has been arrested more than fourteen times for political actions. Starhawk clearly considers "outer work" to be as necessary as "inner work" and calls practitioners to action. She explains that

> [i]inner work, spiritual work, is most effective when it proceeds hand in hand with outer work. Meditation on the balance of nature might be considered a spiritual act in Witchcraft, but not as much as would cleaning up garbage left at a campsite or marching to protest an unsafe nuclear plant.

Vivianne Crowley makes a similar point. 'For the Wiccan,' she claims, 'if it is to be effective, action on one level (the magical/spiritual) must be backed up by action on the physical plane.' Starhawk has experienced numerous situations at political actions and protests in which the political and spiritual have been combined.

A common criticism that liberal and social ecofeminists direct at cultural ecofeminists is that embracing a connection between women and nature is essentialist, ahistorical and anti-intellectual and endorses the patriarchal representation of women. As a socialist ecofeminist, Carolyn Merchant, for example, criticises radical feminism. 'In emphasizing the female, body, and nature components of the dualities male/female, mind/body, and culture/nature,' Merchant claims that 'radical ecofeminism runs the risk of perpetuating the very hierarchies it seeks to overthrow.' Furthermore, according to Merchant, any association with nature is a disadvantage for women. She declares, for instance, that 'any analysis that makes women’s essence and qualities special ties them to a biological destiny that thwarts the possibility of liberation.'

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89 Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, p. 400.
90 Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, p. 413.
93 See Starhawk, ‘Activism Resources’, *Starhawk’s Tangled Web*, <http://www.starhawk.org/activism/activism.html>, 2002–2005 (accessed 5 August 2007), for descriptions of Starhawk’s ongoing political activism. Spretnak describes the merging of the political and spiritual in the following: ‘[t]he presence of ritual circles at gatherings of the radical women’s spirituality movement during the seventies spread to political actions such as the women’s peace encampments at Greenham Common in England and at Seneca, New York, in the United States; the Women’s Pentagon Action, held simultaneously in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and other cities in 1980 and 1981; and numerous actions at sites where design and production of nuclear weapons take place and at nuclear power plants.’ Spretnak, ‘Earthbody and Personal Body,’ p. 277.
Cultural ecofeminists, among them Goddess writers, however, firmly refute the allegation that they are essentialist. Despite the numerous accusations, Kate Rigby emphasises that very few have ever claimed that women's "closeness" to nature is biologically determined.\(^{97}\) Ynestra King argues that, from an ecological perspective, essentialism is not the same as biological determinism.\(^{98}\) King denounces socialist feminists for 'avoiding the important truths being recognized by cultural feminism, among them the female political imagination manifesting itself in political actions.'\(^{99}\) In addition, she accuses them of forgetting 'that no revolution in human history has succeeded without a strong cultural foundation and a utopian vision.'\(^{100}\) Gloria Orenstein disagrees with Merchant's analysis that radical feminists perpetuate the dichotomy 'that liberal feminists seek to transcend'.\(^{101}\) Orenstein maintains 'that radical feminists were thinking in interconnected webs, linking humans to nature, long before the ecofeminist position was articulated.'\(^{102}\) Kathryn Rountree's attempt at a refutation of the essentialism charge is interesting and differs from the defences mentioned so far. She contends that

\[\text{[\text{As feminist spirituality challenges and abandons the patriarchal representation of maternity, it challenges a representation of nature which situates it in opposition and inferior to culture, and does not accept the idea that identification with nature should be gender-based. When women in the movement say that they want to re-connect with nature, they do not mean that men cannot or should not do this too, and they do not see that re-connecting with nature means that they are shunning or estranging themselves from culture. Indeed adherents often insist that for humanity to survive and flourish, men as well as women need to re-connect with nature and they explicitly see themselves as having a role in recreating culture.}}\]\(^{103}\)

Rountree is advocating not just the identification of women with nature, but also the identification of men with nature. This is a fascinating suggestion given the general exclusion of men in Goddess literature. Overall, it is not surprising that Goddess worship has been both influenced by and criticised by ecofeminism. More unexpected, however, is the point of connection sometimes made between Goddess worship and science.

\(^{97}\) Rigby, 'The Goddess Returns,' p. 29.
\(^{98}\) King, 'Healing the Wounds,' p. 115.
\(^{99}\) King, 'Healing the Wounds,' p. 115.
\(^{100}\) King, 'Healing the Wounds,' p. 115.
\(^{101}\) Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 22.
\(^{102}\) Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, p. 22.
IV: Support from science?: the Gaia hypothesis

Goddess writers perceive support for their philosophy in the unlikely area of science in the theory of the Gaia hypothesis. The Gaia hypothesis was formulated by the chemist James Lovelock and the microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the 1970s and contends, according to Riane Eisler, ‘that our planet is a living system designed to maintain and to nurture life.’ According to Goddess writers, the Gaia hypothesis provides support and validation for their worldview. Eisler, for example, claims that

what is most striking about the Gaia hypothesis is that in essence it is a scientific update of the belief system of Goddess-worshipping prehistoric societies. In these societies the world was viewed as the great Mother, a living entity who in both her temporal and spiritual manifestations creates and nurtures all forms of life.

Eisler, like other Goddess writers, is suggesting that pre-patriarchal Goddess worshippers’ attitudes to nature foreshadowed the Gaia hypothesis by millennia and that contemporary scientists are simply reclaiming those worldviews. Like Eisler, Starhawk stresses that the Gaia hypothesis is nothing new. She explains that

[the idea that the Earth is alive is becoming an acceptable intellectual philosophy. Scientists have conferences on the Gaia hypothesis without acknowledging that this is exactly what people in tribal cultures, what Witches, shamans, and psychics, have been saying for thousands of years.]

Similarly Gloria Orenstein echoes Starhawk and interprets the theory as ‘the most contemporary scientific thought arising within our present patriarchal society [and that it] resembles the cosmological view of ancient matristic cultures.’ In the Goddess interpretation, therefore, this so-called new way of thinking is only new in the sense that it breaks with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mechanist and scientific paradigms.

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105 Eisler, ‘The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future,’ p. 26. Eisler’s point is that ‘[t]he way a society structures the most fundamental human relations – the relations between the female and male halves of humanity without which our species could not survive – has major implications for the totality of a social system.’ Italics in original.
107 Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, p. 24. She goes on with the following: ‘Here I refer to the “Gaia Hypothesis” as expressed in J.E. Lovelock’s *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) in which he states that “the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment” (p. ix). J.E. Lovelock and Lynn Margulis have elaborated the Theory of Gaia, that the Earth is alive, is sentient, has its own intelligence, and that we pose a threat to all life if we do not live in harmony with its Earth-Wisdom.’
The choice of Gaia for the title of the scientific hypothesis has been significant. Given that Gaia ("Earth" in Homeric Greek) is the name of a Goddess, Pagan practitioners may have credited Lovelock with more than he was actually intending. While Lovelock stressed that the earth is living, he claims, however, to have intended it as a powerful metaphor.\(^{109}\) Despite his intention, Goddess writers have embraced his theory, as illustrated by Rachel Pollack in the following excerpt:

> Lovelock and his colleagues have insisted that they are not claiming consciousness for the Earth, let alone a divine consciousness. They are not suggesting that the planet is the same as the Greek Goddess. For many, however, it is precisely this possibility that makes the idea such an opening to new ways of thinking.\(^{110}\)

In retrospect, Lovelock was, in fact, astute to give a scientific hypothesis such an inspiring title.\(^{111}\) According to Pollack, William Irwin Thompson suggests that the title gained them publicity and that it "has inspired the public’s leap to assume that “Gaia” is conscious as well as alive."\(^ {112}\) Professor of Religious Studies Geoffrey Samuel points out that the Gaian concept is alleged to have also been developed independently of Lovelock. Samuel explains that in the USA ‘Tim Zell (now Oberon Zell), the founder of the Church of All Worlds, “had a vision of the unity of the Earth’s planetary biosphere as a single organism on the evening of September 6, 1970."\(^ {113}\) While, overall, Goddess writers find support for their ideas of a living, interconnected world in the Gaia hypothesis, some interpretations of it are disturbing. Starhawk is particularly perturbed by the Deep Ecology interpretation, which proclaims that the AIDS virus is part of Gaia’s greater plan to manage the population crisis.\(^ {114}\)

It seems that many Goddess writers take an interest in the Gaia hypothesis because it offers a holistic and ecological view of the world, akin to their own. Given that Goddess writers blame the scientific revolution of the early modern period for environmental destruction, it must have been refreshing for them to have a more supportive view emerge from their long-time nemesis, the scientific world. The

\(^{109}\) James Lovelock interviewed on ABC Radio National: Late Night Live programme, 20 April 2006, 10pm.


opposition between science and religion seems to have lessened for Pagans, perhaps due to the Gaia hypothesis. According to Starhawk, for example,

[when you understand the universe as a living being, then the split between religion and science disappears because religion no longer becomes a set of dogmas and beliefs we have to accept ... Science becomes our way of looking more deeply into this living being that we're all in, understanding it more deeply and clearly.]

Starhawk recommends that Goddess worship be grounded in science. She believes that this is a perfectly logical view, because witchcraft, she claims, has always been an empirical religion. She points out that herbs and spells have always been tested for their effectiveness. Radical feminists generally accuse science of being androcentric and sexist. It is, therefore, fascinating that Starhawk encourages Goddess worshippers to embrace science.

Conclusion

Goddess worshippers do not simply “believe” in the re-emerging Goddess, they “know” and “experience” her as a physical and spiritual presence in the living earth. The concept of an immanent deity fosters the notion of interconnection and thus demands an ethic of responsibility to protect everything in the web of life. It also promotes the deconstruction of dualistic thinking, resulting in the appreciation of all stages of the life cycle – death as well as life.

Contemporary Goddess worship draws upon practices, real and imagined, from pre-patriarchal times, thus enabling devotees to connect with and celebrate nature. An essentialist link between women and nature predominates in the imagery of seasonal cycles and in the anthropomorphism of representations of the Goddess in landscapes. The sacred sites tend to be situated in rural and rustic areas, which aptly fits the Goddess writers’ imaginary of pre-patriarchal times. Goddess pilgrims at sacred sites find time and place to be sacred, eternal and ancient; the past exists in the present. Their religious practices (involved in rituals, creating sacred time and sacred space,

115 Refer to Helen Berger, 'Witches and Scientists,' Sociological Viewpoints, vol. 10, 1994, pp. 56–65, for a discussion of how the gap between magic and science is closing for some scientists.
116 Starhawk, 'Power, Authority, and Mystery,' p. 73.
118 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 191.
120 In this respect Starhawk is aligned with Donna Haraway, who does not endorse the opposition of the organic and the technological. See Caputi, 'On Psychic Activism,' p. 437.
connecting with the past) fit with conventional descriptions of religiousness across cultures, particularly in small-scale societies.

In the Goddess mythistory, writers focus on living beings, but noticeably exclude an analysis of the non-living inventions produced by humans, which contribute to the destruction of the earth and nature. In the Goddess vision there are no oil refineries and steel mills. There is no needless killing, or hunting for game as a sport. The Goddess vision of landscape is a pre-industrial, idealised, rural space. In a predominantly Goddess worshipping culture, presumably oil refineries and mills would be museum items, distant memories of the former patriarchal period. This genre of romantic place requires the absence of modernity. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, patriarchal culture continues to dominate. The continued prevalence of destructive technologies, therefore, would be attributed to the patriarchy, with the hope of them disappearing in the future if, that is, humans embrace the alternative of a Goddess, nature-based worldview.

This new-old religion is well equipped to encourage environmental awareness and action in the present and into the future. Key figures in the movement see their theology as the answer to the contemporary environmental crisis. Riane Eisler even regards Goddess religion as a form of higher spirituality. She proclaims that

> There is today much talk of a new spirituality, of an evolving high consciousness, not only as a passport to a better life after death, but as a prerequisite for sustaining and enhancing life on this Earth. Our reconnection with millennia-long traditions of respect and reverence for our Mother Earth — traditions in which neither nature nor woman were seen as objects for men's exploitation and domination — may be a key component in this more evolved consciousness.

Goddess worship can be seen to have links with the broader movement of ecofeminism. Both movements denounce the patriarchy for the subjugation of women and nature. Not all strands of ecofeminism, however, require the Goddess as an intermediary in the struggle for change or seek inspiration and models in the past for the present.

Arising from the scientific world, the Gaia hypothesis has seemingly given support to the Goddess writers' contention that the world is a living being. On the one hand, it is surprising that Goddess writers would seek support from science, given that it typically

121 Presumably these absences, such as of steel, would condemn women to more laborious domestic tasks.
represents the type of thinking (rational) and method (empirical) that they would associate with a dualistic masculinist approach and, thus, condemn. On the other hand, to perceive support from the mainstream conceivably gives their theories more credibility.

This final thematic chapter will conclude with an excerpt from Starhawk’s vision of the future or, as she suggests, her ‘memories of future lives’. In her historical imaginary of the future, the struggles against patriarchal religions and societal structures have been fought and won. Goddess religion is now popular and worship occurs openly. Society is environmentally aware and traditional Pagan events are celebrated. She dreams:

[i]t is the night of the Winter Solstice. In San Francisco, there are bonfires everywhere: strung along the beaches, blazing on Twin Peaks, on all the high places. In the parks and on rooftops, small groups gather around cauldrons. There are no mass meetings, only circles.

They begin with a very old custom: walking the land and searching for papers or foreign objects. The Elders have debated discontinuing the custom: It is outdated. There is never any trash to find. Nothing is made to be idly tossed away; nothing is wasted.

From the hilltops, the city is a colored mosaic set in green. Everywhere are gardens. The last rays of the sun gleam rose in a thousand solar collectors.

The Witches take hands around the fire. The wind rises, rattling the eucalyptus branches. Across the city, thousands of gaily painted windmills spin to life, flashing the colored lights with which they are decorated at Midwinter. Candles are blown out; altars topple over. No one minds. They have all they need to make magic: their voices, their breath, each other.123

Conclusion

Goddess writers present a mythistory that focuses on the relationships between the Goddess, women and nature; in the past, in the present and into the future. The underlying argument of this thesis is that history is fundamental to Goddess writers and that the concept permeates Goddess worship in many ways. Following an overview of the Goddess mythistory and its key themes, the importance of history to Goddess worship will be demonstrated below.

The Goddess mythistory begins with a portrayal of peaceful, egalitarian matricentric cultures in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods. These “Golden Age” Goddess societies are presented as respecting women and nature. Goddess writers have provocatively re-written the Neolithic revolution as a peaceful period in which women were valued for their discoveries and innovations in agriculture and related activities. As a result, a period of progress is portrayed in the mythistory of the “Golden Age”. It is revealing that the postulated harmful consequences of Neolithic agricultural and land-clearing practices for the environment are not considered by Goddess writers; to do so would challenge their depiction of the “Golden Age” as an era distinguished by its sensitivity towards nature.

In the “Fall” period, the peaceful, cultured Goddess communities are believed to have descended into primitive, hierarchical, patriarchal societies at the hands of warmongering invaders. The Goddess and women lost their independence. They became subservient to gods and men in marriage and became the victims of violent male sexuality. Nature similarly became subordinated, but not until late in the “Fall” period when the patriarchal institutions of science and capitalism caused a revolution in agrarian organisation, transforming peasants’ access to the land through the introduction of enclosure. The early modern witch-hunts, a key feature of the “Fall” period, are depicted as an explicit patriarchal attack on women and their Old Religion. In Goddess literature, the mythistory of the witch persecutions is described in provocative language, supported by impressive figures, and presented as occurring across Europe.

Goddess writers present three main arguments concerning the “Fall” period. Firstly, they stress that the “Fall” was caused by external forces. This account exempts Goddess societies from any responsibility for the transition to patriarchal societies.
Secondly, Goddess writers view the “Fall” period as a relatively short disjunctive in the overall Goddess mythistory, which suggests that patriarchy is not normative. Thirdly, they emphasise the survival of the Old Religion: that is, that pre-patriarchal Pagan practices survived in pockets on the periphery of society. This argument is crucial to demonstrating the Old Religion’s relevance, resilience and continuity. Furthermore, the contention that the Goddess religion did not disappear completely furnishes hope that it can be the dominant religion again in the future.

The (re)emergence of the Goddess and her religion in recent decades (the Goddess “Renaissance” period) is portrayed as being due to the perseverance of women, who have fought against the patriarchal hegemony in a newly welcoming political and religious milieu. The (re)awakening immanent Goddess has had an impact on society with regard to attitudes to women, in terms of empowerment in mind, body and sexuality; and for nature, in terms of encouraging an ecological consciousness. As Goddess writers’ aims have yet to be entirely achieved, they envisage the blossoming of the Goddess “Renaissance” in the future.

In the overall Goddess mythistory, whether a deity is immanent or transcendent is the underlying determinant of a society’s social arrangement, practices and, most importantly, attitudes towards women and nature. In Goddess literature, the concept of an immanent deity prefigures the concept of an interconnected world manifest in community between humans and nature. If the deity is immanent in the earth, then the earth and everything on it are considered to be sacred. It follows, therefore, that everything is to be respected. Such a worldview manifests in a society that is peaceful, harmonious, and interested in the development of skills that provide enjoyment and utility. In contrast, a transcendent deity is perceived as causing a disconnection between the deity and women and nature. As a result, women and nature are considered to be merely matter and are devalued. Furthermore, it follows that patriarchal men are driven to create implements, practices and institutions that cause war and damage the environment. As a result of patriarchal interventions in agriculture, such as enclosure, communities become dislocated from lands that had provided them with a sense of identity and belonging. Religion is mirrored in society. A deity’s immanence or transcendence, therefore, determines the society’s character – whether it is hierarchical and dualistic or egalitarian and holistic.
Goddess writers aim to empower women and challenge cultural attitudes by de-masculinising religion. They also claim to be revolutionary because they are not content to simply reform the existing patriarchal religions, but intend to create their own alternative women-centred religion. In creating a new religion, however, their methods are not necessarily revolutionary. In replacing God with the Goddess and favouring female ascendancy, they, ironically, reinforce binary oppositions, replacing one form of essentialism with another. As seen throughout this project, the aim to displace dualistic thinking is high on the agenda of Goddess writers. This thesis, however, illustrates that the gendered nature of the Goddess reinforces the man/woman dichotomy rather than rejecting it. The category “woman” is central to Goddess worship. Goddess writers attribute a fixed essence to women, beyond cultural and historical conditioning, usually identified with women’s biology, nature and/or psychological characteristics.¹ Inherent in valuing womanhood and nature is valuing the body, the traditionally devalued side of the mind/body dichotomy. Goddess writers view the female form as sacred, as a resource rather than a liability.² They believe that the connection between women and nature is rooted in the life-giving capacities of their bodies, reinforced by the alleged connection between menstrual and lunar cycles, as well as women’s and nature’s similar experiences of exploitation.³

Throughout this thesis I have argued that a concept of history is fundamental to the Goddess movement. It is because of a notion of history that the movement has a narrative, an identity, a sense of authority, a source of inspiration, and a mode of connection to the Goddess. Goddess writers, however, have varying, conflicting, and sometimes inconsistent attitudes towards their history and the sources used to legitimate it. At one end of the spectrum, some consider the feminist “rediscovery” of empirical history to be fundamental in validating their movement. At the other end, some reject academic methods and value non-empirical knowledges. Many, of course, sit somewhere in the middle. Despite the differing attitudes of Goddess writers, the Goddess movement persists with the search for a history, and requires a historical narrative, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, history is of fundamental importance to the

agenda and identity of the movement; a historical narrative gives the movement a past to identify with, traditions and ancient practices. Secondly, Goddess worship relies on its particular version of the past to authorise and validate its existence. To boast ancient origins enables the Goddess religion to compete with the dominant traditional religions, trumping them in longevity at least. Furthermore, claims of being the original religion are important to validating Goddess religion as the “natural” religion.

Goddess writers attempt to present the time in which humans have lived in patriarchal societies as minimal on the grand scale of human existence. It is not sufficient to claim that a matricentric, egalitarian society existed for a comparatively long time. To exist once in the past, and then to die out, could suggest that the patriarchy is the more advanced cultural form, implying that women-centred societies died out because of inherent weaknesses or because they ceased to be relevant. The Goddess writers’ emphasis on the early modern witch-hunts is important in this context. It proves that the Goddess religion was not obliterated because of weakness but because of systematic persecution, implying that when the oppressive behaviour of patriarchal societies is abolished there will be a revival of Goddess religion.

Furthermore, historical narrative can be seen to give the subordinated and suppressed a voice. The Goddess mythistory, after all, is an endeavour to rewrite women into history. In this sense, Goddess writers were influenced by the broader feminist

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4 Janice Crosby explains that ‘[t]he unearthing of women’s spiritual history and legacy has been a primary concern for many spiritual feminists. Even those spiritual feminists who do not do their own historical research have been strongly influenced by those women who have.’ Janice C. Crosby, Cauldrons of Changes: Feminist Spirituality in Fantastic Fiction, McFarland & Company, London, 2000, p. 13.

5 Dennis Carpenter comments on “legitimacy” being desired by Pagans. He explains that ‘[d]espite the implied value placed on the lack of a religious textual heritage providing the inspiration for the spiritual life of contemporary Pagans, many Pagans are also struggling to understand their spirituality within particular historical perspectives in order that it might have historical and cultural legitimacy.’ Dennis D. Carpenter, ‘Emergent Nature Spirituality: An Examination of the Major Spiritual Contours of the Contemporary Pagan Worldview,’ in James R. Lewis (ed.), Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft, SUNY Press, Albany, New York, 1996, pp. 42–43.

6 See, for example, Merlin Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1979, p. 124; Gloria Feman Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess, Pergamon Press, New York, 1990, p. xvi. Orenstein, for example, emphasises that ‘Merlin Stone and Marija Gimbutas have uncovered [the meaning] about the existence of at least 30,000 years of life on Earth, before patriarchy, in which the cosmic Creator was revered in the image of a female.’


8 As Nelle Morton claims, ‘[o]ur research in history, literature, theology, and other fields is beginning to break open the tombs of our foresisters and enable them to walk the earth again, to claim the earth as sacred and for the good, health, and justice of all people.’ Nelle Morton, ‘The Goddess as Metaphoric Image,’ in Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (eds), Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1989, pp. 115–116.
movement, as well as the imperative of feminist social history, to include women in narratives. Another important reason, according to Starhawk, for a group to know their history is that it enables the marginalised to grieve and to understand their present situations. Starhawk also suggests that history enables liberation. She explains that 'the first healing task of a psychology of liberation is to teach us our history. In looking at the past, we can look for the evidence of things – the artefacts that still speak the language of magic. We can read texts for their hints of power and mystery as well as their concrete content.' Above all, then, a group's mythistory gives it inspiration and hope for the future.

In summary, the Goddess mythistory is important for contemporary Goddess practice on many levels. The mythistory of the “Golden Age” provides models and inspiration for women to challenge the patriarchy with regard to history, archaeology and religion, and to change their current situations in order to bring about brighter futures. The comparatively short “Fall” period shows that patriarchal domination is not normative and the Goddess’s (re)emergence shows that she has always been in existence, proving the religion’s continuity. Furthermore, the Goddess mythistory provides Goddess worshippers with a history, heritage and traditions, which are crucial in giving their movement validation and authenticity, and individuals agency and identity.

The way that Goddess writers practise history, engage with sources and formulate their mythistory displays particular methods, patterns and influences. This thesis has revealed that the Goddess writers, for instance, construct a linear narrative, make efforts to be empirical, but engage with sources in an unorthodox way, and, at times, parallel an approach to history (linking the past and present) that is lived in some indigenous societies. It has been interesting to trace the Goddess writers’ choice of sources and theories and, therefore, to see how knowledge is or is not transferred over time, particularly between academia and writers outside of academe. Moreover, traditional ideas, such as the notion that the antiquity and universality of a religion instil it with

9 Starhawk, Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1990, pp. 32–33.
10 Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 33.
11 As Pagan Studies crosses several academic disciplines in the humanities, the transference of knowledge between the disciplines has also been a fascinating process to follow – some scholars, for instance, privilege information from Goddess writers over information from scholars in a different discipline to theirs.
authority, have had a recurring influence on various aspects of the Goddess mythistory, as have the broader movements of feminism and ecofeminism. The remainder of this conclusion will outline the aforementioned methods and influences, commencing with the question of how Goddess writers organise their narrative.

This thesis has argued that the Goddess mythistory is more a linear narrative than a cyclical one. At first glance, the Goddess mythistory may appear to be cyclical; for instance, the “Golden Age” and the Goddess “Renaissance” could be viewed as peaks in the cycle and the “Fall” a trough. Furthermore, the idea of cyclical time fits with the emphasis in Goddess literature on women’s cycles and the earth’s cycles. Closer analysis, however, reveals that the Goddess mythistory is more linear than cyclical; rather than viewing the “Fall” period as the trough in a cycle, it is perceived as an unexpected setback in an otherwise progressive history. Several factors lead to this conclusion. Firstly, the “Golden Age” is presented as an extremely long period of time and the “Fall” as comparatively short one; if the narrative were to be cyclical then both periods would be of similar length. Secondly, the “Golden Age” is presented as a period of linear progress. Within the “Golden Age” the development of agriculture and other inventions suggests progress. If the narrative were cyclical then the end of this period would manifest deterioration. Thirdly, the Goddess “Renaissance” period did not commence because it was time in the cycle for it to do so; rather, Goddess religion is (re)emerging because women have been exercising their agency – seeking information and acting for change. For the Goddess movement, there is also polemical value in constructing a linear narrative. With a progressive linear approach to history the Goddess “Renaissance” will necessarily flourish and continue to do so forever. A cyclical narrative, however, would impose the patriarchy’s return at some point in the future. Goddess worship, therefore, requires a linear narrative if it is to imagine long-lasting woman- and nature-centred societies.

Despite their often dismissive attitudes to empirical history, I would argue that Goddess writers nevertheless rely upon it and make efforts to be empirical. They generally display, for example, a preoccupation with chronology and geography in demonstrating when and where matricentric societies existed and when and where the patriarchal conquest occurred. Moreover, they employ pseudo-historical statistics, such as the

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12 By the term “traditional ideas” I am referring to ideas that are in contrast to modernist thinking – see Chapter Two.
alleged figure of nine million witches persecuted in the early modern period. They also appropriate support from the empirical world of science in Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Even if the figures and dates are inaccurate or support from science misinterpreted, I would argue that these attempts at empiricism serve to imbue the mythistory with authority. Goddess writers, therefore, practise conventional history, to a point, in their use of "facts" and also in the way they seek validation from history, prehistory, archaeology and anthropology.

Goddess writers and orthodox historians differ not so much in the types of sources that they use (academic historians increasingly engage with sources other than written texts, such as landscape and memory), but in how they engage with them. Historians' engagement with their sources is mediated and interpretative. In contrast, Goddess writers' relationship to their sources is unmediated and direct - they practise history intuitively. At sacred sites, for example, devotees use their senses to see, feel and imagine their way into the past. In relating to their sources devotees exist in the present and at the same time travel into the past. The present, in fact, is historicised. History, therefore, underlies their experience and enables them to connect to their deity. This unmediated method of engagement with the past is problematic in academe and can be understood as being more akin to indigenous attitudes to the past than to western critical academic history.

Another thread that has arisen from analysing Goddess writers' use of particular sources (and lack of interest in others) has been the transference of knowledge. Several key features of the Goddess mythistory, including interpretations of the early modern witch-hunts (for example, the promotion of Murray's argument, and the reiteration that nine million witches were burned), and nineteenth-century ideas of a pre-patriarchal pan-European Goddess, come from scholars and/or non-specialists whose work has long since been discredited. It is interesting that, for instance, Murray continues to be cited, but today's experts in the field of early modern witchcraft are not. Either Goddess writers are unaware of the current wealth of scholarly work on the topic, because it is not available in the mainstream, or choose not to engage with it because it does not provide them with the evidence that they need to support their mythistory, and because they perceive it as unsuitable for their audience. This situation shows that critical academic work does not always reach popular culture, non-specialists, or even, in some cases, related academic disciplines.
Many elements of the Goddess mythistory are influenced by literature, archaeology and attitudes of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Firstly, Goddess writers' descriptions of the countryside are reminiscent of nineteenth-century Romantic descriptions of idyllic rural settings. Goddess writers look to pre-modern societies with nostalgia and imagine future Goddess societies in similar halcyon ways. In valuing the pre-industrial, Goddess worship is expressing a new Romanticism. Secondly, many locations that receive attention in Goddess literature, such as Sir Arthur Evans's excavation of Knossos on Crete, were discovered and promoted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Diane Purkiss highlights the importance of male scholars from this period and later, including Evans, Sir James Frazer, Erich Neumann and Robert Graves, for the contemporary Goddess movement. While their work has indeed been influential, Purkiss neglects their female counterparts, such as Jane Ellen Harrison and Jacquetta Hawkes. Furthermore, Purkiss misconceives Goddess writers' use of these earlier theories. Goddess writers do not adopt the male scholars' ideas wholesale or view the Goddess as a muse as Graves did. Rather, they view the Goddess from a feminist perspective – that is, as a deity with agency.

Other influences on the Goddess movement are the broader movements of feminism and ecofeminism. It is unsurprising that many concerns of 1970s/80s feminism and ecofeminism are reflected and articulated in the Goddess mythistory. The feminist critique of marriage and concern for reproductive rights, for instance, is mirrored in the Goddess writers' representation of the "Fall" period in the way that Goddesses lose their independence and empowerment in reproduction and become victims of violent male sexuality when they become wives to gods in the patriarchal polytheistic pantheons. The celebration of the body, so prevalent in the "Golden Age" and the Goddess "Renaissance" periods of the Goddess mythistory, is clearly a reflection of contemporary feminist concerns.

Goddess worship practises a feminist politics of gender identity. It expresses the interests of a group mobilised by their common experiences, as victims of oppression and sexism in spiritual and secular realms. It is grounded in essentialist feminine values and, unlike Marxist and liberal feminisms, is committed to maintaining them. The

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essentialist nature of Goddess worship provokes criticism from Marxist and liberal feminists who believe Goddess worship reinforces the situations they have been striving to change. In contrast, Goddess writers find the essentialist link unproblematic and, in fact, argue that it is empowering for women and nature. Goddess writers claim that the benefits from Goddess rituals and pilgrimages do flow on into daily life. Goddess writers argue that valuing essentialist feminine qualities has given women the confidence to emerge from the private sphere to tackle political issues. There are, for instance, numerous examples of visibly powerful public protests by Goddess worshippers, from ‘[p]lanting flowers on nuclear arsenals and dancing on missile silos’ to ‘street theatre against nuclear nightmares’. The efficacy of such spirituality-based modes of political activism, in practical terms, remains questionable, but they are modes of action nevertheless. Furthermore, Goddess worship affirms all aspects and stages of womanhood, thus challenging western cultural attitudes that hide menstruation, dehumanise the birth process and value young women’s physical appearance while devaluing that of older women.

Due to the historical development of Goddess worship, the movement is, firstly, feminist and, secondly, concerned with ecological issues. Today many Pagans belong to environmental groups. A return to the Goddess has encouraged some Pagans to reassess their relationship with nature and mother earth, while some environmental activists have turned to the Goddess as an extension of their Green philosophy. In the Goddess mythistory of the “Fall” the essentialist link between women and nature means that women and nature both occupied subjugated positions. It reflects the ecofeminist premise that the patriarchy subordinates both women and nature.

The Goddess mythistory contains various ambiguities. Firstly, although Goddess writers pay attention to specific dates and locations, their descriptions of events, beliefs and practices are often generalisations that are ahistorical and presented as occurring across many cultures and vast geographical areas (for example, being pan-European or global). In this regard, the Goddess is the one constant that links the various times and places. Secondly, the recurring theme of “rural versus urban” is treated inconsistently. In the “Golden Age”, for example, urban areas are hailed as Goddess centres of culture and creativity. In the representation of the “Fall”, however, the reverse occurs: cities

are man-made, unnatural, and dominated by patriarchal institutions. Thirdly, the Goddess writers' concerted effort to promote non-dualistic philosophy is questionable. Fourthly, their attention to dates, locations and figures suggests an endeavour to practise empirical history; at the same time, however, Goddess writers employ unorthodox methods. The apparent contradictions, however, are not perceived by Goddess writers to be problematic. Goddess writers' eclectic appropriation of ideas across cultures and time periods, their unmediated engagement with sources and unorthodox methods, and the perception that Goddess worship manifests a non-dualistic philosophy, often leads to the interpretation of Goddess worship as a postmodern religion.15 While these techniques may be perceived as postmodern, I would argue that the Goddess writers' construction of the Goddess mythistory, as a metanarrative and the basis of a group's identity, indicates that Goddess worship is firmly situated within modernity. The contemporary metanarrative of Goddess worship surely challenges the theories of postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard who claim that we can no longer believe in grand narratives.

This thesis has furthered academic scholarship on contemporary Goddess worship by presenting a perspective from the discipline of history in which the Goddess writers' representation of the past has been analysed to reveal how they engage with, articulate and understand the sources they choose, and how they arrange them into a meaningful mythistory. This mythistory has been shown to empower their dual commitment to women and nature, and provides them with authority, origins, identity, and inspiration. Understanding the Goddess mythistory is fundamental to understanding this new movement.

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Appendix A: Scholarly critiques

Goddess writers' historical practice has been subjected to criticism from within academe, particularly from scholars who criticise the Goddess movement for historical and archaeological inaccuracies and poor methodology. As has been specified in Chapter One, this thesis does not assess the Goddess movement by such criteria – rather, it is interested in the meaning and purposes of the Goddess mythistory. This appendix, however, will, outline such criticisms in order to indicate the scope of the scholarly work in the field. Furthermore, many scholars criticise a representation of the past that most Goddess writers no longer advance. It will become evident, for instance, that contemporary Goddess writers, in general, do not claim that the pre-patriarchal period was a matriarchy. This appendix will also detail the charge of essentialism, which is a recurring critique throughout this thesis and comes from the broader movement of feminism. Goddess writers' responses to critiques will also be highlighted.

Criticisms concerning interpretation and usage of sources

The main criticisms advanced by scholars concern Goddess writers' interpretations of archaeological sources, the contention that Goddess religion has origins in prehistory, the "matriarchy" issue, and the accusation that Goddess worship aims to replicate the past in the present. With regards to interpretations of prehistoric artefacts, the archaeological practice of the feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas has suffered serious criticism. According to the archaeological scholar Lynn Meskell and palaeoanthropologist Margaret Ehrenberg, for example, Gimbutas has excluded male and sexless figurines from her archaeological record, thereby creating an impression of exclusive female idolatry.\(^1\) Another area of criticism concerns the presumption that archaeologists can decipher the connotations of Neolithic art and artefacts. The difficulty of entering the mindsets of prehistoric cultures is generally acknowledged by archaeologists.\(^2\) Helene Foley contends that 'the fundamental difficulty is that we cannot reconstruct paleolithic or neolithic social structure from the archaeological evidence in a fashion that permits reliable interpretations of its religious systems and


\(^2\) Meskell, 'Goddesses, Gimbutas and "New Age" Archaeology,' p. 75.

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symbols. This practice is also criticised for failing to consider the range of meanings, other than the religious, that female figurines may denote. For example, they may simply serve the purpose of decoration. A further criticism concerns the suggestion that powerful religious symbols materialise into social empowerment. Critics such as Gerder Lerner question this assumption and show that examples throughout history prove otherwise. Lerner, for instance, explains that '[i]n view of the historical evidence for the coexistence of symbolic idolatry of women and the actual low status of women, such as the cult of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages, the cult of the lady of the plantation in ante bellum America, or that of the Hollywood star in contemporary society, one hesitates to elevate such evidence to historical proof.'

The idea that Goddess religion has roots in prehistory and has continued, albeit underground or on the periphery, throughout history to arise in recent decades, is a highly contested issue between academics and Pagans. Scholars tend to argue, instead, that its origins can be traced to the revival of magic in the Renaissance and from the emergence of Romanticism and Occultism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These historical precursors are far more recent than the prehistoric roots that Goddess writers present in the Goddess mythistory.

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Goddess writers have often been accused of portraying early societies as matriarchal. Given that the “matriarchal” debate is ongoing, it is worth outlining it from both the critics and Goddess writers’ perspectives. I will argue that the Goddess writers are well aware of the criticism and, thus, are cautious with their choice of terminology. Some scholars, however, continue with their allegations by focussing on early texts, which are in many cases precursors to the movement and have since been reassessed by Goddess writers.

The “matriarchy” issue is a major focus of academic criticism and concerns Goddess writers’ mythistory of the “Golden Age”. Their presentation of an idealised, peaceful, harmonious, matricentric society is questioned by many writers, including Rosemary Radford Ruether,7 Cynthia Eller in her book The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, Philip Davis in The Goddess Unmasked and Sally Binford in her article ‘Myths and Matriarchies’.10 The main critique is directed at the claim that Palaeolithic and Neolithic society was “matriarchal”. Indeed, numerous writers have used the word “matriarchal” to describe the “Golden Age”, but what they actually understand the term to mean is less clear and, as Margot Adler observes, “[t]here is no consensus on what the word matriarchy means, for either feminists or scholars.”11 While the literal meaning is ‘government by mothers, or more broadly, government and power in the hands of women’, Adler asserts that it is rarely used in this way.12 She explains that

Engels and others in the Marxist tradition use the word to describe an egalitarian preclass society where women and men share equally in

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7 Ruether questions whether this notion of a pre-patriarchal peaceful society is really history. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1992, p. 151. She spends a chapter in her book Gaia and God, (chapter 6, “Paradise Lost and the Fall into Patriarchy”), critiquing the version of the past that asserts a fall from pre-patriarchal paradise into patriarchy. She contends that this “story” is too simplistic and is ‘both too total in its negativity toward classical cultures and too naïve about early tribal people. Without more careful evaluation, this “story” can mislead us about how we understand ourselves as Western people and our capacities for both good and evil.’ She does admit, however, that there are many elements in this story with which she agrees. The problem she has with their version is that it can be dangerous because ‘it too easily allows somewhat marginalized Euro-American women and men to identify themselves with a lost innocence and to fail to take responsibility for their own complicity in the evils they excoriate.’ Ruether, Gaia and God, pp. 7–8.

8 In The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory Eller has made a complete turn-around since her previous book. She now claims that the evidence to suggest the existence of prehistoric matriarchal societies is completely distorted.

9 Philip G. Davis, Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1998. Davis is a professor of religious studies, primarily interested in Christology. His minor research interests include neo-Paganism. He is a practising Anglican.


12 Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 192.

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production and power. A few Marxists do not call this egalitarian society a matriarchy, but most in the tradition do.

Other writers have used the word matriarchy to mean an age of universal goddess worship, irrespective of questions of political power and control.\textsuperscript{13} The concept of an “original matriarchy” was popular in Marxist thought and acquired by some influential feminist writers such as Matilda Joslyn Gage\textsuperscript{14} and Elizabeth Gould Davis.\textsuperscript{15} Gould Davis, in her book The First Sex, proposed the theory of the “original matriarchy” and her book did influence early Goddess writers. Following Gould Davis, Z. Budapest, for example, had a vision for the future of a “socialist matriarchy”.\textsuperscript{16} Margot Adler claims that spiritual feminists, like Budapest, were inspired by past matriarchies and the hope of return to the long lost past. Budapest, however, is an exception in recent Goddess literature. Most writers of Goddess literature from the 1980s onwards are extremely aware of the linguistic confusion surrounding the term and are cautious with their descriptions of Goddess societies. Instead of “matriarchy” they use terms such as “matrifocal”, “matristic”, “matriculture”, “matrilineal”, and “matrilocal”,\textsuperscript{17} and particularly stress that the “original” society they discuss is not simply the reversal of “patriarchy”. Riane Eisler, for example, describes the egalitarian original society as a “partnership” society, as opposed to a “dominator” model.\textsuperscript{18} If the early writers did in fact use the term “matriarchy” to imply female domination and male subordination, then more recent writers have responded by discarding this usage. In her book The Rebirth of the Goddess, Carol Christ, for example, declares that the theory of

\textsuperscript{13} Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 192. Italics in original.

\textsuperscript{14} Matilda Joslyn Gage, Women, Church, and State, Arno Press, New York, 1893.


\textsuperscript{17} The terms matrilinearity (descent through the female line) and matrilocality (where a family lives in the home of the women’s family) do not necessarily equate with a situation whereby women are heads of households or exercising authority. In fact, according to Sally Binford, matrilineal institutions are often associated with patterns of male warfare, an example being the Iroquois who were warlike and strongly matrilineal. Binford, ‘Myths and Matriarchies,’ p. 65. According to Tina Passman, ‘[t]he terms “matricentric” and “matriculture” describe a matrilineal culture with women as the focus; in such a culture, there is usually an extended clan structure, with goods and status passed through the motherline.’ Tina Passman, ‘Out of the Closet and into the Field: Matriculture, the Lesbian Perspective, and Feminist Classics,’ in Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin (eds), Feminist Theory and the Classics, Routledge, New York, 1993, p. 185. The terms “matricentric”, “matrifocal” and “matristic”, therefore, more accurately describe a woman-centred society, and have been the ones most often employed in the thematic chapters of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{18} See Riane Eisler’s explanation of partnership societies in Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987, p. xvii. She proposes that there are two models of society: 1) the dominator model: ‘is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy – the ranking of one half of humanity over the other’; 2) the partnership model: ‘in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking’. Italics in original.
a "primitive matriarchy" is outdated. In her recent book *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess* Kathryn Rountree states that the idea of a "matriarchy" is no longer pursued, implying that the criticism from scholars is redundant. In her field research during the 1990s, Rountree was told by one interviewee that

Goddess feminists have moved beyond wanting to "pay men back" or to simply invert patriarchal rule by establishing or re-establishing matriarchies. Inversion or reversal of the two systems is not a favourable solution because it does nothing to change the existing model of power relations which casts people either as dominators or as dominated.

The criticisms by Cynthia Eller and Philip Davis in their recent publications are, then, somewhat surprising given that Goddess writers have been more careful with their conceptualisation in recent years.

In summary, while a few writers of early Goddess literature did refer to Goddess societies as matriarchal, or were influenced by earlier second-wave feminists, or even earlier male archaeologists, anthropologists or mythographers, most did not, or certainly do not now. What they do desire is a "partnership" model. In literature from the last two decades the point is made repeatedly that a simple reversal of patriarchy is not the

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22 Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, particularly Chapters Six and Seven.

23 Philip Davis discusses Elizabeth Gould Davis's *The First Sex* and her references to an original matriarchal society. Davis, *Goddess Unmasked*, p. 42. Considered as a precursor to the Goddess movement, Elizabeth Gould Davis’s ideas, however, have not been embraced uncritically by Goddess writers. Philip Davis, however, seems to be unaware of this and continues to debunk their ideas. See also: Davis, *Goddess Unmasked*, Part IV, 'Matriarchy and Witchcraft', pp. 259–343.
writers’ intention. Therefore, the version of the “Golden Age” that many scholars dismiss is not the same one that most Goddess writers advance.

If scholars do concede that Goddess writers do not believe that the “Golden Age” was a matriarchy, they still accuse them of aiming to revive the “Golden Age” in the present. Juliette Wood, for instance, implies that neo-Pagan groups, such as those associated with Goddess worship, aim to ‘lengthen their historical traditions’ and recreate a past to counter dissatisfaction with the present. Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris contend that Goddess devotees either view the Goddess as a metaphor or as an ‘attempt to reconstruct a literal past’. Some Goddess writers respond to accusations of “replicating” a literal past in the present, as well as to criticisms about their inaccurate use of history, by claiming that history does not matter to them at all. Many other Goddess writers and some scholars of Paganism respond to the accusation of replication by declaring that contemporary Goddess worshippers do not endeavour to recreate or revive the past in the present. Kathryn Rountree, for instance, emphasises that the mythistory of the past “Golden Age” is used, not to replicate it in the present, but to find ‘models of different kinds of gender arrangements’ and to show ‘that patriarchy and god-worship are not normative’. Asphodel Long also found inspiration and support in the concept of a non-patriarchal past to deal with inequalities. The main point that Rountree and Long make is that discovering a pre-patriarchal history, which is vastly

24 For example, reclaiming the Goddess does not mean that they are reclaiming ‘a cluster of essential, “womanly”, nurturing characteristics, and neither is she seen as the singular, omnipotent or even sexually specific counterpart or reversal of the Judaeo-Christian God.’ Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess,’ p. 152.
28 See Chapter One for examples. Chapter One argues that even when Goddess writers claim that the past does not matter to the contemporary version of Goddess worship, writers do, in fact, seek inspiration and models in the past.
30 Asphodel Long explained: ‘It took over thirty years to find it. There in the London Women’s Liberation Movement in 1975 I became part of The Matriarchal Study Group which sought not only to deal with the problems in terms of today’s inequalities, but called upon the past to support the thesis that the female had not always been subordinate, but from earliest times had been part of the divine.’ Asphodel Long quoted, without reference, in Kathy Jones, The Ancient British Goddess: Goddess Myths, Legends, Sacred Sites and Present Revelation, Ariadne Publications, Glastonbury, England, 2001, p. 195.
different to the current situation, proves that a patriarchal situation of God worship and female subordination is not a normative arrangement, but emerged historically.

Goddess writers defend their position by responding adamantly that the contemporary movement is new. Starhawk simultaneously implies that her religion is old and new when she claims that 'Witchcraft is indeed the Old Religion, but it is undergoing so much change and development at present that, in essence, it is being recreated rather than revived. The feminist religion of the future is presently being formed.' Starhawk clearly does not present the movement as a literal replication of the past. Likewise, Gloria Orenstein does not call for a re-creation of the past in the present. Rachel Pollack completely dismisses the criticism. She explains that

[p]eople sometimes criticize contemporary Goddess worshippers for mingling research and fantasy, archaeology and wish fulfilment. It seems to me that such criticism misses the point. The modern Goddess religion is not trying to recreate conditions exactly as they were in the Stone Age, or in ancient Crete, or any other time or place. Instead, we seek to learn from those people as we allow the Goddess to come alive in a way that matches our own experience.

The attitude of Goddess writers in the last two decades has certainly emphasised the fact that they seek inspiration in the pre-patriarchal period - but no Goddess writers really believe that they will be replacing a twenty-first century society with a Neolithic one.

Critique of essentialism

The fact that the Goddess historical imaginary of the “Golden Age” is women-centred lends itself to accusations from within feminism of “biologism”, “essentialism”, and “sexism” as well as concerns regarding the use of the term “matriarchy”. The Goddess

33 Rachel Pollack, The Body of the Goddess: Sacred Wisdom in Myth, Landscape and Culture, Element Books, Shaftesbury, Dorset, 1997, p. 2. Merlin Stone makes the same point in the following excerpt: ‘I am not suggesting a return or revival of the ancient female religion. As Sheila Collins writes, “As women our hope for fulfilment lies in the present and future and not in some mythological golden past ...” I do hold the hope, however, that a contemporary consciousness of the once-widespread veneration of the female deity as the wise Creatress of the Universe and all life and civilization may be used to cut through the many oppressive and falsely founded patriarchal images, stereotypes, customs and laws that were developed as direct reactions to Goddess worship by the leaders of the later male-worshiping religions.’ Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman, Harcourt, Inc., Orlando, 1976, p. xxv.
34 Firstly, with reference to the feminist theorist Toril Moi’s ideas, Dawne McCance explains that ‘proponents of a “textual” politics refuse the biologism and essentialism which they see lurking behind “woman-centred” feminism, arguing that “it is not the biological sex of a person, but the subject position she or he takes up, that determines their revolutionary potential.” Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, Methuen, London, 1985, p. 12, quoted and paraphrased in Dawne McCance, ‘Understandings of “the Goddess” in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship,’ in Larry Hurtado (ed.),
historical imaginary is frequently accused of essentialism. There is little disagreement, among scholars, that Goddess worship is an essentialist feminism. Sally Binford exemplifies most of the critics when she explains her problems with Goddess religions. She assesses them as follows:

Feminist authors concerned with demonstrating religions based on the Great Goddess often share the assumption that there are enormous psychological and biological differences between the sexes; women are by nature sensitive, loving, and nurturing, while men are aggressive, brutal and violent. As anthropologist Gayle Rubin points out, this is precisely the assumption of conventional sexists, and it cannot be supported by either biological or social science. One of the major thrusts of feminism has been the refutation of these culturally defined sex differences and the adamant refusal of women to accept such definitions of themselves.

The main criticism from the broader movement is of its “biological essentialism”. Micaela di Leonardo, among others, accuses the Goddess movement of “essentialism” in its ‘tendency to emphasize the procreative and nurturing aspects of woman, its romanticizing of the connection between women’s menstrual cycles and the lunar cycle, and its insistence that the primary image of divinity was female.” The critics accuse Goddess worshippers of celebrating the “essential” feminine characteristics and thereby of reinforcing ‘the sexist categories we are trying to transcend’.

Many writers of Goddess literature are aware of such criticisms aimed at their work. Z. Budapest, for example, addresses the criticism of essentialism in her description of the “self-blessing ritual.” She explains that just because it acknowledges women’s genitals

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Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate, University of Manitoba Studies in Religion, No 1, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1990, p. 175.


Binford, ‘Counter-Response,’ pp. 558–559. Binford adds: ‘[t]he task of women today is to break free of the strictures of the “feminine” as set forth by our culture and not to embrace them in the name of spirituality. The most exciting aspect of modern feminism is that we are free to explore what women are really capable of, rather than to accept the mothering role set out for us by men for centuries. Cliches about the nurturing, gentle nature of women, whether offered by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Norman Mailer, or feminists themselves, are the same in content and oppress all women.”


and ability to create life does not suggest that all women must have children. Budapest explains that blessing the genitals is simply a recognition of our connection with all that is female. The biological destiny that was used against us actually is the basis of our divinity. People come to me and say, “Z., how can you allow biology to become destiny again? You know what they did with that before.” “I’m sorry,” I reply, “we do give birth, we do issue forth people, just as the Goddess issues forth the universe. That is a biological connection and manifestation of the Goddess. It is not something I’m going to keep quiet about. It is what women do, we make people.”

Z. Budapest, thus, does not refute the charge of essentialism, though she shows her awareness of its Nazi connotations. With a sense of pride she affirms that her practices are essentialist. Carol Christ agrees with Budapest “that it will not help women to pretend that giving birth and nurturing children are not important in our lives.” She criticises the “anti-essentialist” view for not being ‘fully embodied, that it implicitly accepts the dominant western view that the self is located in the mind, rather than in the body-mind continuum.’ She maintains that the feminist efforts towards reaching equality (involving men rearing children equally) have not been successful; it is still women who do the majority of nurturing and childcare, so we might as well acknowledge this reality. Gloria Orenstein responds to those who label Goddess matristic art essentialist, but unlike Budapest and Christ, she endeavours to refute the charge. She asserts that matristic art does not refer ‘naively to an ahistorical, biological “feminine essence.”’ She adds that ‘works about the Great Mother evolved specifically out of a historical quest.’ Stein is careful to avoid being accused of essentialism by including other notions of “birthing”. She explains that ‘since in goddess worship every woman is a part of the creative mother, every woman participates in creation by her own acts of birthing and shaping.’ These acts of birthing are not limited to childbirth and may refer to the creation of books, rituals, music, cloth and art.

40 Another possible interpretation of essentialism is to associate it with Nazism. Isaac Bonewits, an American Pagan, has noticed the tendency of neo-Pagan articles to reduce women to stereotypes suffered under patriarchy. He accused this notion of being ‘not so far from the Nazi conception of women: Kirche, Küche und Kinder (church, kitchen, and children)’. Isaac Bonewits, Gnostica, vol. 4, 1975, pp. 2, 34, 38, paraphrased in Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 212. Italics in original.
41 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 92.
42 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 92.
43 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, pp. 92–93.
Carol Christ pre-empts the criticism that the celebration of the female body in Goddess religion, as well as the female gender of the deity, are unfair to men or sexist. She explains that

[w]e must remember that the Goddess is emerging at a time when women, women's bodies, and nature have been devalued and violated for centuries. In this context, the metaphor of the Goddess has the power to shatter long-standing cultural attitudes and prejudices about women and nature. The Goddess as metaphor brings healing to our historical situation.48

She acknowledges that the Goddess has been more significant for women than men, but she believes that men are increasingly finding healing from the Goddess's powers.49

In conclusion, Goddess writers respond to the aforementioned criticisms and critiques in a number of ways. Firstly, they simply ignore them. Secondly, they dismiss academics for bias. Goodison and Morris point out how '[s]ome Goddess movement writers accuse the academics – archaeologists and ancient historians – of wilfully ignoring the evidence for female power in prehistory.'50 Thirdly, they reject the criticisms as being inaccurate. The accusation that Goddess worshippers are trying to literally re-create a "Golden Age" "matriarchy" in the present is dismissed again and again by Goddess writers, but it still arises. In her recent publication, Ruether suggests the social arrangement in prehistory needs to be reconsidered and described as 'more egalitarian but probably not female-dominated.'51 Goddess writers have been asserting this view for at least the last two decades. Fourthly, they acknowledge the criticisms and reply by downplaying the importance of "history" to their movement and pay lip service to Goddess worship being a "new" religion. While writers stress that their religion is new, most simultaneously emphasise links to pre-patriarchal religions and figures, such as ancient Goddesses or medieval witches. For example, Starhawk claims that '[t]oday women are creating new myths, singing a new liturgy, painting our own icons, and drawing strength from the new-old symbols of the Goddess'.52

48 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 94
49 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 94.
52 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 188. See the subsection, 'Goddess writers' attitudes to "history"', in Chapter One, Section I. 'Methodology' of this thesis for more information.
Appendix B: Goddess writers' historical practice

Goddess writers construct their historical imaginaries by using a variety of sources including archaeology, history, anthropological analogies, mythology, images, symbols, intuition, and, occasionally, Jungian archetypal theories. Many of the aforementioned domains have appeared in discussions throughout this thesis in relation to instances within particular chapters. This appendix, however, will focus on more general examples that can be applied more broadly.

The following appendix will outline the Goddess writers' use of sources to offer an understanding of where and how they find proof and justification for their constructions. It will become evident that Goddess writers do actually make attempts to position themselves in scholarly discourse, in the way that they produce evidence for their mythistory. The following will consider how Goddess writers use archaeology, anthropology, and the study of myths to support their mythistory. It will also discuss Goddess writers' infrequent use of Jungian theories and their criticisms of this practice.

Many writers rely heavily on archaeological sources. This evidence has come primarily from male archaeologists, such as James Mellaart and Sir Arthur Evans, but also from feminist archaeology, particularly that practised by Marija Gimbutas. Riane Eisler, for instance, refers to the archaeological findings of Mellaart (at Çatal Hüyük) and Gimbutas (throughout Old Europe) and considers this information to be new, rich, and scientific, in comparison with the so-called conventional view of the Neolithic.¹ According to Eisler, this new data has been crucial in challenging the popular belief that Sumer was the first cradle of civilisation.² ‘Rather’, she claims, ‘there were many cradles of civilization, all of them thousands of years older.’³

Marija Gimbutas’s lifelong endeavour to find the meaning of prehistoric art and religion has offered a new perspective to the discipline of archaeology and forms a major source

of evidence for writers of Goddess literature. It is claimed that Gimbutas’s pioneering archaeological work ‘unequivocally [sic] establishes the existence of a Goddess religion in Neolithic Europe with its roots in the Paleolithic’.4 Gimbutas’s claim that the original civilisation in Europe (the period she has coined the term “Old Europe”) was peaceful, harmonious and woman-centred5 rests on her findings of vast numbers of female figurines from the Neolithic indigenous civilisations of the Balkans and Greece. For Gimbutas, along with Merlin Stone, Carol Christ, Gloria Orenstein and Starhawk, among others, the presence of female imagery proves the existence of a female deity and a social organisation in which women held power and feminist values were promoted.6 The Goddess writers conclude that the existence of female figurines suggests that women enjoyed power, and a high social status. This conclusion rests on two premises. The first assumes that the presence of female figurines, and representations of women in cave paintings, express reverence for a Goddess.7 The second assumes that the existence of a female deity intrinsically affirms women, promoting equality for them in society.8 The first premise presumes that archaeologists can decipher the connotations of Neolithic art and artefacts.9 The second suggests that powerful religious symbols materialise into social empowerment.10 The reverse of the second premise is also displayed. It considers women’s status in society first, and then the sex of the deity, which may follow to reflect the sex that has the most influence in society. Carol Christ, for example, contends that ‘[i]f women were the first agriculturalists, perhaps initially guarding the secrets from men, then there is a social and economic basis for the primacy of the Goddesses in the earliest agricultural societies.’11

4 Marija Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989, quoted from front sleeve. The blurb writer goes on to assert (on the back sleeve) that ‘Gimbutas’s magnum opus takes the existence of Goddess-worshiping, earth-centered, egalitarian, and nonviolent cultures out of the realm of speculation into that of documented fact.’ See Appendix A for criticisms of Gimbutas’s work by Margaret Ehrenberg and Lynn Meskell.


6 Gimbutas took this approach, for example, when she claimed that ‘[t]he images and symbols in this [Gimbutas’s illustrated] volume assert that the parthenogenetic Goddess has been the most persistent feature in the archeological record of the ancient world.’ Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess, p. 321. See, also, the opening quote of Chapter Two by Starhawk.

7 See Appendix A.

8 For example, that the Goddess is the ‘source and reflection of the strength and creativity of women.’ Carol P. Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987, p. xi.

9 See Appendix A for criticisms of this premise by Lynn Meskell, Helen Foley and William Barnett.

10 See Appendix A for a criticism by Gerder Lerner.

A second form of evidence, advanced to support the existence of ancient matricentric societies, supposes that it is possible to understand the conceptual processes of the earliest Homo sapiens.\textsuperscript{12} Merlin Stone maintains that by speculating on an Upper Palaeolithic person’s ‘quest for the ultimate source of life’, the nature of the first deities can be understood.\textsuperscript{13} Stone and Gimbutas suggest that, as woman is the giver of life, she serves as a metaphor for creation and, therefore, would have been humankind’s first deity. Gimbutas, for example, claims that

\begin{quote}
[according to myriad images that have survived from the great span of human prehistory on the Eurasian continents, it was the sovereign mystery and creative power of the female as the source of life that developed into the earliest religious experiences. The Great Mother Goddess who gives birth to all creation out of the holy darkness of her womb became a metaphor for Nature herself, the cosmic giver and taker of life, ever able to renew Herself within the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth.]\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The third form of evidence proposed as an explanation relies on anthropological analogy. As anthropologists often describe hunter/gatherer societies as egalitarian,\textsuperscript{15} Goddess worshippers make the analogy with hunter/gatherer societies of the prehistoric period. Stone is of the opinion that, as some contemporary tribal societies are reported not to understand biological paternity, it must follow that ancient societies had a similar lack of awareness, thereby strengthening her conjecture that if women were seen as solely responsible for the production of life, communities would have been mother-kinship societies.\textsuperscript{16} Similar analogies are made with regard to food provision. Some writers suggest that, as women in contemporary hunter/gatherer societies enjoy high

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{12} Merlin Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1979, p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{15} The anthropologist William Haviland, for instance, explains that social stratification is more likely to occur in large heterogeneous populations. In contrast, egalitarian societies are more likely to be food-foraging. ‘Generally speaking’, Haviland claims, ‘sexual inequality is characteristic of societies that are stratified in other ways as well; thus women have historically occupied a position of inferiority to men in the class-structured societies of the Western world.’ William A. Haviland, Cultural Anthropology, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Fort Worth, 1990, pp. 307–308. Another example of an anthropologist equating hunter/gatherer society with egalitarianism is Catherine Berndt. Berndt, for example, claimed that traditional Australian Aboriginal societies were hunter/gatherer societies and therefore had to be egalitarian. Catherine Berndt, ‘Interpretations and “Facts” in Aboriginal Australia,’ in Frances Dahlberg (ed.), Woman the Gatherer, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981, p. 172.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Stone, ‘When God Was a Woman,’ p. 125.
\end{itemize}
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social status because they are responsible for providing the greatest proportion of food, the same could be said for women in ancient societies.

A fourth source of information, often used to enhance archaeological data, is the study of myths. Riane Eisler believes that some myths support ideas discovered in archaeology and vice versa. Eisler claims that we have actually known about early Goddess cultures for centuries, well before the archaeological data emerged to prove their existence. She explains that 'almost all societies have legends about an earlier, more harmonious time.' She presents the example of the Greek poet Hesiod who 'writes of an age when the Earth was inhabited by a golden race who “tilled their fields in peaceful ease” (in other words, the Neolithic) before a lesser race brought with them Ares, the Greek god of war.' Another prime and explicit example is the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, which informs us of 'an earlier time when woman and man (Adam and Eve) lived in harmony with one another and with nature.' She suggests that '[t]he Garden is probably a symbolic reference to the Neolithic period, since the invention of agriculture made possible the first gardens on Earth.' According to Eisler, the knowledge of prehistoric Goddess cultures through the archaeological record help us to understand why, for example, Eve would take advice from a serpent. The myths and archaeological findings, therefore, support each other.

A fifth area, and a controversial theoretical framework of interpretation, infrequently used by Goddess writers is Jungian archetypal theories. According to Johanna Stuckey,
Goddess devotees have been drawn to the Goddess content in Jungian psychology. Stuckey suggests that Jungian archetypal theory is well known among Goddess worshippers, 'probably the result of the work of Jungian mythographers like Joseph Campbell and feminist Jungian therapists like Jean Bolen and Sylvia Perrera.' Carol Christ explains that in a vista that has been ignored by 'traditional scholarship in the classics and religion,' the work on the Goddess by Erich Neumann (Jungian), Robert Graves (poet and mythographer), Sir James Frazer, Joseph Campbell (Jungian), and other followers of Jung, has certainly filled the void. A few Goddess writers have found inspiration in the Jungian archetypal perspective. The implications of using archetypes as source material is that Goddess worship is understood more as a psychology than as a religion with a historical and prehistorical background. The Jungian approach emphasises dreams and fantasies, views the Goddess as a metaphor, and forms a relation with the deity though psychoanalytic theory.

The Jungian archetypal approach is widely criticised from within the Goddess movement for two main reasons – firstly, due to the ahistoricity of the perspective and, secondly, because of the inherent sexism of Jung’s ideas. Regarding the first criticism, Joan Townsend explains that understanding the Goddess as an archetype removes religion from ‘history or sociological sequences in the real world.’ Erich Neumann, for example, understood the concept of the “matriarchy” as ‘a psychological reality’, rather than as a ‘historical state.’ Gloria Orenstein is critical of archetypal theories due to the “ahistoricity” of the notion. For example, she stresses that

[o]ne of the more vocal reactions has been to say that the Goddess is an archetype, and that all archetypes are ahistorical. I want to respond to this point up front, because it is precisely this kind of reaction that blurs history. To call the Goddess an archetype is to relegate some 30,000 years of human history to the level of the unconscious and to negate the actual historical reality of centuries of human life. Therefore, the Goddess is anything but

25 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 133.
26 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, p. 86.
ahistorical! The history of the Goddess actually exceeds that of the Father God by millennia.

Carol Christ is also scathing about the work of Jung and his followers, as in the following excerpt:

[j]he work of Jung, Neumann, Campbell, and Graves on the Goddesses must be approached with great caution. They have uncovered important information and brought it to a wide audience. But they have each distorted the history of the Goddess through the imposition of theories that see the Goddess as symbolic of the unconscious feminine. In this view, there could never have been a “civilization” of the Goddess because civilization is considered a product of the emergence of “man” into the “light” of “rationality” and “consciousness”. Nor could there ever have been a “conscious” Goddess because consciousness is identified as the realm of the masculine ego. Women, as representatives of the unconscious feminine, cannot be expected to play anything but supportive and animating roles in the male project of culture. Unfortunately, such views have been unintentionally repeated in various ways in some recent work by women on the Goddesses. This in turn has led critics to view the Goddess movement as restricting women to stereotyped roles.

According to Christ, it is dangerous to uncritically quote the ‘deeply flawed’ work of these men. To do so hinders ‘the cause of historical accuracy.’

The second criticism, also illustrated by Carol Christ, concerns the sexism of Jungian theory. Christ explains that ‘[f]or Campbell, the Goddess (and woman) are the unconscious material background for the spiritual quest of the male hero, who gradually comes to know what will always remain unknown (unconscious) for her.’ The male hero is conscious, rational and advanced, while women are unconscious, irrational and devoid of civilisational potential. Asphodel Long is critical of the Jungian “feminine” and “masculine” categories. For Long the idea that each personality has a “feminine” and “masculine” category is problematic because women and men can never really escape their gender-related category. As the “feminine” category supposes women to be ‘perceptive, receptive, sensuous, intuitive and diffuse’ and men to be ‘intellectual, analytic, explicit, active’, the situation for women is limited and, even, hopeless. Long explains her objections, as follows:

[m]any still today believe that the Feminine and thus women are more sensitive, caring, perceptive, intuitive and so on, and yield to the Masculine the areas of intellectual thought and activity in the professional world.

33 Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 86.
34 Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 86.
35 Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 87. Interestingly, Joseph Campbell wrote the forward to Marija Gimbutas’s *The Language of the Goddess* towards the end of his life. Christ thinks it is unlikely that his appreciation of Gimbutas’s work ‘would have led to a reformulation of his basic ideas.’
My opinion is that this is not only mistaken but is dangerous. There is within it, a covert sexism that, keeping traditional ideas of "women's place", appears to allow some power and autonomy.37

The 'sentimental notions of femininity' entrench women in traditional stereotypes and attitudes.38 If Goddesses are not playing out the stereotypical "feminine" behaviour, then they are portrayed as temptresses or bad mothers. As bad mothers they are usually defeated by male heroes.39 Either way, the image is not empowering or liberating for women, nor does it gain them respect. Goddess writers do accentuate women's "female" characteristics; unlike Jungians, they do not view them negatively or as women's only traits.

Goddess writers engage particularly with archaeology, anthropology and history in order to provide evidence for their mythistory and, thereby, gain legitimacy for their work. Their methodology is often criticised in academe, particularly for their selection of sources. Rather than criticise Goddess writers for their practice, this thesis has been more interested in understanding the meaning of their arguments and how they support them by their particular selection of sources.

39 Stuckey, Feminist Spirituality, p. 133.