



**VAGINA FECUNDA AND VAGINA DENTATA:
DEFINING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL ROLE OF BIRTH IMAGERY
IN VISUAL ART, FANTASTIC LITERATURE AND SCIENCE FICTION FILM**

THESIS

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Until Ridley Scott introduced science fiction audiences worldwide to Ripley and her alien in 1979, science fiction films had previously reflected a decidedly male perspective. They usually featured heterosexual male fantasies, which sprung from male writers, were envisioned by male directors, and enacted by male actors. When they utilized fantasy women and female genital imagery—the *vagina fecunda* and the *vagina dentata*—these vehicles became both a conscious and unconscious representation of either an idealized version of the contemporary perfect woman or a demonized variation on Simone de Beauvoir's feminine "other." However, since *Alien's* release, women have gained considerable power as screenwriters, directors, producers, art directors, and actors in science fiction and other genres. The input of Sigourney Weaver, Gale Anne Hurd, Mimi Leder, and Jodie Foster, along with the countless women who have worked in less visible positions as costume and set designers, screenwriters, visual effects designers, and other powerful positions has resulted in increasingly powerful female roles and a change in vaginal imagery that have attracted both male and female audiences to science fiction films released throughout the world. By analyzing the female characters and images, I will explore these filmic manifestations of desires and anxieties of modern audiences, the transformations of the female stereotype, and the historical roots of these images beginning with the earliest known examples of birth imagery.

Since the beginning of recorded civilization, when polytheistic people worshipped a variety of male and female gods, the *vagina fecunda*—literally the

fertile vagina—has appeared in visual depictions of maternal strength, desire, spiritual renewal, and creativity (cover art), while the antithesis of the positive birth image—that of the *vagina dentata*—arose to represent the fear of seduction, spiritual death, and feminine destructive power. Although Carol Clover and Barbara Creed have analyzed the *vagina dentata* image in horror film, they repeatedly define it as a male construct that relies on a Freudian framework. Mythologist Barbara Walker provides a more balanced definition of the *vagina dentata* from a male perspective in her feminist text, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*:

[The] "toothed vagina," the classic symbol of men's fear of sex, expressing the unconscious belief that a woman may eat or castrate her partner during intercourse. . . . It is well known in psychiatry that both males and females fantasize a mouth as the female's entranceway to the vagina. . . "Mouth" comes from the same root as "mother"—Anglo-Saxon *muth*, also related to the Egyptian Goddess Mut. Vulvas have labiae, "lips," and men have believed that behind the lips lie teeth [and express] a fear of being devoured, of experiencing the birth trauma in reverse. Stories of the devouring Mother are ubiquitous in myths, representing the death-fear that the male psyche often transforms into a sex-fear. (*Myths* 1036).

Jung's analysis of gendered archetypes serves as a springboard for the present study.

Although such psychoanalytic authors as Karen Horney and Kaja Silverman and film theorists Barbara Creed, Carol Clover, Mary Russo, and Mary Ann Doane, have explored vaginal imagery, most of these writers have relied on a Freudian or Lacanian framework that concentrates on the marginalization and vilification of women that can be found in the sexual imagery of horror films and the *femme fatale*. These authors analyze culture and/or film from a male perspective, not

acknowledging that audiences are comprised of both sexes and women often encourage men and other women to accompany them to films of all genres. Therefore, it seems safe to assume that some women enjoy feminine imagery for reasons similar to those that cause men's appreciation of phallic monuments.

It is astonishing that many theorists have virtually ignored the female response to seeing a huge pudenda on screen while clinging to the castration model put forth by Freud and Lacan. It is true that Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray have explored both male and female responses to the vagina and feminine imagery; however, their speculations remain generally in the realm of the philosophical rather than in the domains of visual art or film imagery.

Constance Penley's "Time Travel, the Primal Scene, and the Critical Dystopia" analyzes a bi-gender response to *La Jetée* and *Terminator*; however the criticism mainly deals with subtext and rape imagery and avoids the role of Robert Graves' symbolic "unseen mother" that he describes in *The White Goddess*. Penley refutes the notion that science fiction film is a "sexless genre," but she limits her analysis of the female subtexts and imagery.

None of these authors have undertaken a systematic analysis of a broad range of female imagery in a broad range of art, literature, and film. In this interdisciplinary study, I employ a psycho-historical approach to analyze vaginal imagery and explain the polarity between the fertile and the devouring vagina—the *vagina fecunda* and the *vagina dentata*. This bi-polar imagery parallels our culture's Madonna-whore complex, a dysfunction that seems to affect the attitudes of both genders toward women in general.

Just as Jung explored the power of archetypal imagery, this study will examine the influence of archetypal and stereotypical images of female sexuality. However, vaginal images are not solely male constructs. They have often appeared in household visual art and as metaphors in legends told at family

gatherings, both of which have historically been female domains. Even in the most patriarchal cultures throughout history, women have often wielded their power as consumers of art and purveyors of culture. For images in art, literature, religion, and film to withstand the test of time they must have some cross-gender appeal. Vaginal imagery produces strong emotional responses in both genders; however, interpretations of subtextual messages differ depending on the individual's unconscious desires and fears.

Rene Magritte's *The Rape* (fig. 1) offers a visual depiction of the connection between the mouth and the vagina, which illustrates that men sometimes envision women as sexual vehicles. On one hand, this association combines the fear that women will devour men during sexual intercourse with the phallogentric view that a woman's purpose is solely to provide male pleasure. On the other hand, the absurdity of the vagina superimposed onto the mouth also indicates a criticism of the objectification of women in this manner. The duality inherent in the mouth as a vagina in Magritte's painting also expresses the notion that objectified women may be seen as angry and devouring.

Throughout the centuries, vaginal images in art, literature, mythology, and religion seem to be linked to the transformation of female stereotypes as women gain and lose power due to social and economic changes. In recent history, the popularity of science fiction films—most of which tend to be heavily laden with sexual imagery—has steadily increased since the late 1950s, coinciding with both the atomic age and the latest women's movement. Using a Lacanian reading of the transformation of vaginal imagery as an embodiment of female power, I will attempt to interpret various artistic responses to various pendulum swings of female power throughout Western Civilization up to and including contemporary science fiction film.



Figure 1. René Magritte's *The Rape*

Today's science fiction films help promulgate a new universal mythology ("May the force be with you") that at times continues the dual tradition of the "good" and "bad " woman through deification and demonization. In characters resembling the Madonna and whore and images evocative of the *vagina fecunda* and the *vagina dentata*, filmmakers represent desire and fear, heaven and hell, euphoria and pain. Because most science fiction films and videos are released to a worldwide market through satellites, the internet, and the industrial distribution of film and video, the global village envisioned by Marshall McLuhan is fast becoming a reality. Most science fiction films contain universal sexual symbols that tend to be meaningful to audiences worldwide. Probably not coincidentally, the body of current science fiction film contains a semiotic language that includes homages to visual art, classical and urban mythology, religion, folklore, plus earlier film and television, creating a media-induced, historically-inflected version of Carl Jung's collective unconscious in a specific and concrete way. Jung explains his theories in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*:

Although the specific shape in which they express themselves is more or less personal, their general pattern is collective. They are found everywhere and at all times, just as animal instincts vary a good deal in the different species and yet serve the same general purposes. We do not assume that each new-born animal creates its own instincts as an individual acquisition, and we must not suppose that human individuals invent their specific human ways with every new birth. Like the instincts, the collective thought patterns of the human mind are innate and inherited. They function, when the occasion arises, in more or less the same way in all of us (64).

Birth imagery found in science fiction films that are financially and/or critically successful is a cross-cultural representation of feminine power that apparently taps into the audience's collective thought patterns with regard to desires and fears

wherever the film is released. By placing the art of seduction in science fiction film within the context of the history of feminine sexual symbolism, certain patterns of characters, images, and archetypes can be discerned. Because images of the mother, sexuality, birth, and rebirth constitute a large part of our earliest and most powerful symbols and metaphors for the nature of existence, these patterns often mirror societal attitudes toward female power in various historical settings starting from the earliest known Neanderthal tombs dating from two hundred thousand years ago.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF MATRIARCHY: PREHISTORY

"This is the symbol of motherhood, this giving of your substance and every damn thing to your progeny. That is why the mother becomes the symbol of Mother Earth. She is the one who has given birth to us and on whom we live and on whose body we find our food"

—Joseph Campbell, *The Power of the Myth*.

Archaeological discoveries of ancient tombs point to the notion that Neanderthals believed birth linked the realms of the living and the dead. The configuration of these burial sites indicates a hope for both rebirth and an afterlife. As far back as 200,000 years ago, *Homo Neandertalensis* buried their dead in a fetal position with the head pointing east, (Lederer 24) presumably so their dead would be reborn from the womb of the earth. Joseph Campbell's *Power of the Myth* explains that "when people are buried, it's for rebirth. That's the origin of the burial idea. You put someone back into the womb of mother earth for rebirth" (270). Later during the Ice Age in burials that date from 20,000 to 30,000 years ago, the dead "were interred with a considerable amount of ornamentation comprising bracelets, pendants, necklaces, and rings, as well as grave goods such as spears and stone tools [indicating that the dead would use these items in the next life]. The graves . . . were liberally sprinkled with red ochre and charcoal. . . ." (Bahn 65). Perhaps this reddish-black interior was an attempt to represent the blood of afterbirth to pay homage to the earth mother's womb in hopes that their buried loved one would be reborn.

Continued fascination with and respect for the mystery of birth seems to be evidenced in the female statuettes dating to almost 32,000 years ago (fig. 2, 3, & 4). These figures—Venuses of Galgenberg, Willendorf, and Kostenki—all appear to represent women in their child-bearing years. As a matter of fact, all three look like



Figure 2. *Venus of Galenberg*



*The Venus of Willendorf,
Austria, c.20,000 BC.
This is one of the earliest
known representations of
the mystery of female
fertility.*

Figure 3. *Venus of Willendorf*



Figure 4. *Venus of Kostenki*

women who have born several children and may currently be pregnant. The endomorphic body shape reflects , according to Reay Tannahill (30), a woman with enough wealth to be well-fed during a time when many people suffered from malnutrition. However, it is impossible to ascertain exactly what the statuettes symbolize. Do they represent a "great" fertility goddess? Are they simply examples of ancient portraiture? Anthropologists can only determine that the Venus statuettes have been found in sites across much of the European continent. They are generally thought to possess religious meaning and symbolize political power in matriarchal or matrilineal societies (Bahn 64; Kahn 73; Eliade 21).

Tannahill believes that during the Neolithic period, women were viewed primarily in their role as mother, and as such they were probably highly revered (36). Apparently, it was thought that women spontaneously multiplied and therefore had magical powers. However, this must have been a double-edged sword. Probably the sins of the mother were blamed when the fates condemned a child to sickness, dismemberment, or death.

Most anthropologists believe the Neolithic people probably did not connect sexual intercourse with procreation until as late as 9000 B.C., perhaps because between a million years ago and 10,000 B.C. the human population only increased from one hundred thousand to three hundred thousand. This means that although most women had sexual intercourse, many did not conceive and few babies survived. Diseases such as gonorrhea and filariasis as well as malnutrition probably caused mass infertility and infant mortality. Thirty thousand years ago, eighty-six people out of a hundred died before reaching thirty, and the average woman had only fifteen or so childbearing years (Tannahill 24, 30). In her sparsely populated world, a pregnant woman who had previously borne several children was at the very least a rarity; she was perhaps even viewed as a deity, or at least the revered, wise, old woman of the village. She probably cared for her

own children as well as the children of others who had died. So, even if the Venus statues, as some believe, are neither religious nor political, the influence of the mother cannot be understated. The large breasts and stomach would indicate women who were either pregnant or had born several children. (Tannahill 54)

In contrast to the positive images of the *vagina fecunda*, the 6250 to 5400 B.C. level in Çatal Hüyük and the 3000 to 2000 B.C. level in Malta revealed many "terrifying and demonic" (Eliade 55) "Venus" statuettes. (figs. 5 and 6)

Archeologists admit that they know very little about these apparently angry statues. Perhaps these images of women represented agricultural society's instability and anxiety over the shift in power that accompanied the incursion of nomadic tribes.

Tannahill describes this period of strife in *Sex in History*:

During the first 3,000 years of recorded history, the agriculturists of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and northwest India suffered a number of sometimes peaceable, sometimes warlike invasions by nomad pastoralists, male-dominated religions [who were] more dynamic than settled peoples because of the higher level of protein in their diet [and] more alert because of the . . . demands of the nomadic life style. As they. . . settled, their myths and beliefs found a place in the existing structure, sometimes being superimposed on it, always leading to changes within it, and always increasing the masculine emphasis. (51)

Although these statues could be seen as angry and evil, they could also have been seen as a visual representation of the fear of birth, sex, and death, all of which were incomprehensible for ancient peoples. Another possible interpretation is that nomadic men might have settled in one village. After the initial honeymoon phase of peace and frequent sexual intercourse, a former Viking might have felt a loss of self, a spiritual castration. Therefore, the pregnant woman with wolves might



Figure 5. Seated Venus with Cats



Figure 6. *Fat Lady*

represent the sharp tongue, teeth, and claws—what the artist saw as a domineering woman.

Between 8000 and 5000 B.C., the agricultural revolution increased the food supply and consequently enhanced fertility, thus causing a population explosion, which could have resulted in a more cavalier attitude toward childbearing women. Perhaps the ancient statues of angry women depicted female displeasure over that loss of respect. We cannot accurately determine the rationale behind human imagery created so long ago, but what is known is this: The women featured in the statuettes dated before circa 10,000 B.C. appear relaxed and calm, usually in a state of rest, while the much larger images dated after 7000 B.C. feature women who are either sitting or standing. Mircea Eliade's *A History of Religious Ideas* describes the seated Venus found in Çatal Hüyük (fig. 5), at the 6250 to 5400 B.C. levels as having been erected large in stature and accompanied by images of powerful, wild cats (45-46), whose large teeth can be interpreted as a devouring image of the *vagina dentata*. Paul G. Bahn's *One Hundred Great Archaeological Discoveries* states that the "fat lady," (fig. 6) a massive, skirted Venus statue, is the "earliest known monumental statue" (81) in Europe. The statue appears to be of a powerful, threatening woman. The femininity of the skirted Venus statue is further reflected by the Maltese temple (fig. 7) that houses the "fat lady." Bahn, perhaps unconsciously, uses common metaphors for the external female genitalia to describe the temple :

[The] imposing concave façades and massive entrances leading to central courtyards. Other apse-shaped enclosures lead out from the courtyard like flower petals. . . with a small porthole in the centre. . . . (Bahn 75, 80)

Barbara Walker believes that "Mycenaean *tholos* or beehive tombs, like Celtic burial mounds, provided imitations of Mother Earth's pregnant belly from which the dead could be reborn, through a short 'vaginal' passage, often through a

Hal Saflieni

The temples of Malta were religious shrines, but did not function as burial places. The Neolithic inhabitants of Malta placed their dead in tombs that were cut into the actual rock, and the shape of the temples might be based on the shapes of these rock-cut tombs, which were often one or two irregularly-shaped chambers linked by short corridors and entered through a 'porthole' from above. One rock-cut tomb stands out amongst the rest. At Hal Saflieni, a series of interlinked chambers, known as a hypogeum, has been cut out of the solid rock. Even so, its twenty chambers are carved with roof beams, lintels and other features of buildings above ground, and the walls are painted with pictures of cattle. In this hypogeum the remains of perhaps 7000 people were found, so it is likely that it was in use for a considerable time.



Figure 7. Maltese Temple interior



Figure 8. Tomb of New Grange

triangular door" (*Symbols* 107). The Tomb of New Grange in Ireland (fig. 8), dating from 3500 to 2000 B.C., shows spirals, and a small opening at the entrance. The tomb contains mounds, and ". . . certain motifs and designs seem to recur in many places. Spirals, concentric circles, lozenges, wavy lines and U-shapes are all common in the passage graves" (Bahn 82). The Celtic "spiral was connected with the idea of death and rebirth: entering the mysterious earth womb, penetrating to its core, and passing out again by the same route" (Walker, *Symbols* 14). Similar images can be found at many burial sites throughout Europe.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH OF PATRIARCHY: ANCIENT GREECE

The source of sexual tension in ancient Greek myth is not so much the drive to the ecstasy of consummation, but uncertainty as to whether either or both partners will survive the sexual act..

—Patricia Storace's *Dinner with Persephone* (1995)

Ancient Greece, the birthplace of western culture, contains birth metaphors to represent death in mythology, drama, and philosophy. Around 700 B.C., Homer composed heroic poems that had been previously told in the oral tradition for some 500 years. In *The Iliad*, an account of the Trojan War, Homer uses the following birth metaphor to describe Agamemnon's painful war wound that appeals to both men and women:

[A]fter the sore place was dry, and the flow of blood stopped,
his sharp pains began to break in on the strength of Atreides.
As the sharp sorrow of pain descends on a woman in labour,
the bitterness that the hard spirits of childbirth bring on,
Hera's daughters, who hold the power of the bitter birthpangs,
so the sharp pains began to break in on the strength of Atreides. (*Il.* 11:
267-272)

This type of bi-gender inclusion must have played a part in the constant retelling and subsequent canonization of the *Iliad*, which has become a source of cross-cultural fascination for twenty-seven centuries. Contemporary feminist author Robbie Kahn argues that Homer's birth metaphor may reference a matrifocal culture (59). Undoubtedly, these poetic lines seem to indicate that Homer—or an earlier oral storyteller—empathized with the birth process. Although many classical scholars have expressed doubt that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by the

same person, to my knowledge no one has ever questioned that the author of the *Iliad* was a man. The written inclusion of this metaphor indicates that Homer could not have had the birth process completely hidden from him. It is doubtful that hearing and retelling the poem was his only knowledge of labor and delivery. Maybe he heard women giving birth. Perhaps he saw a woman in labor. His wife might have described her own labor pains to him. Regardless, Homer, his audience, and the ancient oral storytellers before him understood that both childbirth and war wounds could result in extreme pain and that warriors and mothers have something in common: both are noble because both have suffered for someone else.

Homer's recognition of the connection between mothers and warriors was not restricted to the *Iliad*. According to Greek law during Homer's time, the only epitaphs on tombstones state the deceased died either in childbirth or war (Lerner 203). Also, Homer's contemporary, Hesiod, included several birth metaphors in *Theogony*, another ancient Greek text that has survived twenty-seven centuries. To some extent the birth-war connection was part of that society's collective unconsciousness. Undoubtedly, for the ancient Greeks childbirth and combat were the two most noble ways to die, which can explain why metaphors of birth and war permeate Greek literature and—after twenty-seven hundred years of the waxing and waning of ancient Greek scholarship—ours as well.

Around 700 B.C. in Greece, Hesiod wrote *Theogony*, an account of the Greek creation mythology. Like the *Iliad*, this collection of legends was previously passed down through the oral tradition. Unlike Homer's single birth reference, numerous powerful childbirth metaphors permeate Hesiod's writing. Although other extant written versions of Greek mythology exist, Hesiod's is the most complete and most widely read from the Classical Period to the present. Hesiod's poem consists of stories in which male and female gods, demi-gods, and mortals

conflict in a variety of power struggles having to do with sex, death, and reproduction, all of which were considered part of the female realm.

According to Hesiod, Gaia and Uranus, the primordial couple, together produced the twelve Titan gods, three Cyclopes, and three ugly Hecatoncheires with fifty heads and one hundred arms each. Uranus hated the Hecatoncheires passionately and, according to myth, shoved them back into Gaia's womb and kept them there, a condition which caused her intense pain. She asked her children to kill her husband and avenge her pain, using a phallic flint sickle she had assembled herself, making her an archetypal phallic woman. Only the youngest Titan, Chronos, was "brave enough to carry out her plot" (Hesiod 132-135). This myth seems to express the male fear that mistreated women and children can become dangerous because they might seek revenge for their suffering.

According to *Theogeny*, Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual intercourse and love, was birthed through family violence. She was born when her brother, Chronos, castrated her father to avenge his mother, Gaia, for the atrocities that her husband, Uranus, had inflicted on her. Aphrodite was born from their father's severed genitals that Chronos threw into the sea, an act which both phallicized her character and undoubtedly expressed the linkage of castration and death to feminine love and eroticism in the Greek mind. The famous statue from the second century features an androgynous *Aphrodite of Melos* (fig. 9) with severe hair, small breasts, and a thick waist—a figure that has been considered by some to be a standard of beauty from the Hellenic Period to the present.

Aphrodite's brother and creator, Chronos, became the chief Titan and ruling deity. However, according to Hesiod, Chronos repeated his father's sins and abused his own sister and wife, Rheia. Together they produced the Olympian gods, whom Chronos swallowed at birth to prevent the prophesied seizure of his throne. However, Rheia took Zeus from him and gave Chronos a stone to swallow

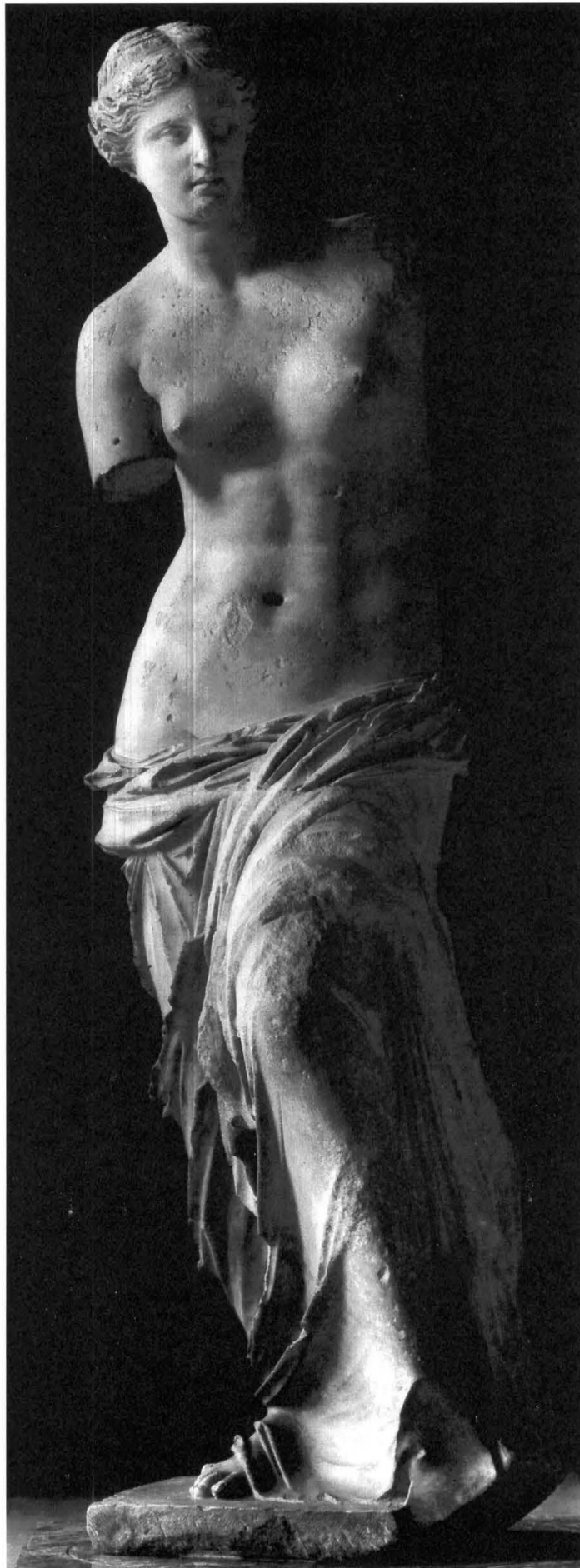


Figure 9. *Aphrodite of Melos*

instead. Zeus later acquired a potion from the Titaness Metis that caused his father to vomit his siblings, with Zeus becoming "lord over immortals and mortals" (Hesiod 149-151).

Gaea's and Rheia's reactions are justifiable because they do not retaliate until their husbands attempt to disturb the *oikos*:

[The *oikos*] is something central to Greek society, a constant. Paris removes Helen to Troy and is therefore an extreme case of an adulterer. Extreme cases are characteristic of myth. The abduction of Helen functions as the cause of the Trojan War, which is therefore in some measure about the destruction that results from the undoing of the *oikos*. Destroy the *oikos*, destroy the city? The intertext of archaic and classical Greek myth also mirrors, or recapitulates, this theme at the end of the story: Agamemnon returns home to find his *oikos* too disrupted by adultery. This adultery destroys the *kyrios*, Agamemnon. The adulteress is Helen's sister, Clytemnestra, and their sisterhood seems innately meaningful, as in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. (Dowden 50).

Using similarly violent and sexual imagery, the mythical Uranus gave Gaia a reverse abortion when he shoved their unattractive children back into her womb; Chronos cannibalized Rheia's beloved children for his own personal gain; and Zeus relentlessly slept with dozens of goddesses and mortal women. However, the goddesses made the gods pay for their disruption of the *oikos* through castration or male birth. Uranus's testicles become his daughter; Chronos's children experience rebirth when he is forced to vomit them; and Zeus's head becomes a womb—all rather unpleasant experiences for these powerful males.

Another unusual and perhaps misogynous birth image from Greek mythology features the creation of the first woman, Pandora, from mud after Prometheus gave fire to man against the wishes of Zeus. As a result, the gods and

goddesses gave Pandora, the first created woman, beauty, cunning, and curiosity that Zeus had calculated to bring about the ruin of man. Zeus had Hermes deliver her to Epimetheus, Prometheus's dim-witted brother, because he was an easier mark than their malefactor. Prometheus had already warned his brother not to accept gifts from Zeus, but Pandora offered Epimetheus sexual pleasure that he could not resist. Pandora knew that opening the box was forbidden; however, her curiosity got the better of her and she opened the box, which caused the evils of the world to be let out. Only hope was left in her box. Zeitlin, a late twentieth century classical scholar, analyzes the myth of Pandora's box from Hesiod's *Works and Days* in *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*:

The image of Pandora's box in the *Works and Days* is a substitute for and analogy to, the woman's womb, according to which Elpis is the child (or the hope of a child) and Pandora's acts of removing and replacing the lid of the jar represent the breaching of her virginity and the subsequent closure that is necessary for pregnancy to occur. . . . If Pandora is meant to stand for all humankind, as some critics have suggested, the text does not situate her creation as the final and culminating display of divine generative power. It occurs, at a very different juncture during the unfolding of a cosmogonic drama in which, unlike Genesis, there are a multitude of gods. (Hawley 60).

Zeitlin further explains that the myth of Pandora's box contrasts "man's patient industry with woman's useless idleness" (59). It also serves as a warning to men that some women are dangerous because they possess excessive curiosity. However, the myth is much more complicated with regard to the fact that hope remains with Pandora. Without hope life has no point; therefore, the myth also implies that the human female is important only because she is necessary to procreate. Children, as always, were the hope for the future and the only sure guarantee of any sort of immortality. Despite these positive interpretations, the

myth also justified keeping wives in seclusion so they would not cause harm to themselves and others because of their weak character. The myth implies that women should not trust each other, a notion that might have inhibited many women from having contact with would-be friends except during religious festivals that celebrated birth, fertility, or death.

Such violent birth and genital imagery in Greek mythology coincides with the tendency in ancient Greek art and literature toward the valorization of homosexuality and ambivalence regarding women, motherhood, and sex. Were male attitudes toward women affected by the monstrous birth imagery and frightening goddesses? Regardless of the psychological makeup of the ancient Greek male citizen, many historians believe that Greek citizens tended to have small families because once they sired an heir, older men seemed to prefer to have sexual relations either with young males or with educated prostitutes, *hetaerae*, who practiced anal sex to avoid pregnancy (Denning 73, Tannahill 103, Lerner 202). Anal sex with *hetaerae* was depicted on vases (fig. 10) and pederasty with young mentees was described in Plato's *Symposium*, which features a miffed Socrates, annoyed because his lover will not allow him to look at other beautiful, effeminate young men (213 d).

For many wives of citizens, being in the realm of the feminine meant they were generally confined to the home except for such social activities as preparing and attending religious festivals, funerals, or childbirths, when all women were allowed to congregate to worship and perform their duties (Denning 70). These duties are symbolized in Greek mythology as the *Moirae*, or triple goddesses, Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis, archetypal representations of women in three stages of development performing their respective societal roles—virgin, mother, and elder. In this cluster, Lachesis the old crone, cuts the threads of men's lives after her younger sisters Clotho and Atropos spin and weave the cloth of life, a

Hetaira with client



Figure 10. Heraeraï on vase

pattern that indicates how women control three of the most important aspects of existence. The mythology of the Fates emphasizes the power that women derive from groups in which they handle the most delicate aspects of any person's life.

No doubt, during these ceremonies, mistreated women discussed their plights and possibly conspired to find solutions to their subjugation, which probably included seclusion, physical abuse, and infanticide—all legal under Greek law (Tannahill 97). According to Claudine Leduc, "The marriage contract thus placed the wife in the position of her husband's ward" (274). Victimized wives may have looked for answers in their goddesses of hearth, sex, and childbirth.

Despite the social and legal structures that suppressed women's activities, some women were able to form groups independent of the sanctioned gatherings. Among these groups were Sappho's women's colony on the Island of Lesbos. Our limited knowledge of seventh century Greece indicates that on the island of Lesbos, Sappho was a spiritual leader for a cult of women who lived together isolated from men. Sappho's lyrical poems are some of the few extant poems written by a female ancient Greek author. Sappho's contemporaries criticized many of her poems because they contain obvious lesbian themes and subtexts; however, the daily life of the residents of Lesbos is somewhat unknown. Sappho wrote the following fragment:

(hoped?) . . . of love . . . (for when) I look
at you face to face, (not even) Hermione (seems to
be) like you, and to compare you to golden-haired
Helen (is not unseemly) . . . mortal women; and be
assured, by your . . . (you) would (free?) me
from all my cares . . . (dewy) banks . . . to stay
awake all night (Sappho 73).

This example of Sappho's poetry demonstrates her profound love for the women in her group as well as a reference to her lover's "dewy banks," perhaps a metaphor for her moist, aroused labia.

Groups of Athenian and Spartan women celebrated at what Lin Foxhall describes as "raucous, all-female bonfire parties, held at night, as well as a special, all-female meal" centered on Demeter—a fertility goddess—and Dionysus—the god of wine—during the months of December and January, when it was too cold and wet to work in the fields (104). Euripides describes the rites of Dionysus in his popular play, *The Bacchae*, in which a couple of men spy on a group of women performing the Rites of Dionysus. When the men are discovered, the women, who become the embodiment of the *vagina dentata*, tear their bodies apart in a psychotic frenzy that ends with the realization that one of the women has killed her own son. This tale serves as a warning that women cannot control themselves in groups without the supervision of men.

Amazon myths also reflect how Greek men feared large groups of women. Legend has it that these fierce women refused contact with any men and would amputate one breast to become better archers and warriors. This grotesque image of female castration represents a desire to substitute maternal nurture for battle strength by de-sexing themselves through both disfigurement and isolation. In vase art, Amazons are typically depicted as utilizing phallic weapons in battle with men (Duby 227).

Huge Medusa statues dating from 580 B.C. also appear to represent another phallic-feminine element of Greek society not only because of their snake-like phallic hair, but also because they represent, according to Jane Caputi, the menstrual cycle:

Medusa's serpent hairs symbolized menstrual secrets. The Gorgon signifies serpent-guarded wisdom—female spiritual knowledge. A forbidding glance

from Medusa, like a glance from a menstruating woman in a variety of folk beliefs, could turn men to stone—that is stop them in their tracks (163).

Homer's *Odyssey* chronicles the heroic legend of Perseus, who encounters the Gorgon triple goddesses on his adventures. In Homer's account, Athena, goddess of wisdom, conspires with Perseus against the Medusa Gorgon, the only one of the three who was mortal. She tells him to cut off her head to kill her and not to look at any of the Gorgons else he would be turned to stone. Afterwards, Perseus gives Athena the Medusa's head to wear on her chest, which would have resulted in the placement of the gorgon's mouth directly over the genital area of the goddess of war. In other words, Perseus gave the warrior goddess a prosthetic *vagina dentata*.

Athena's collusion with a human male implies to Greek women that they should not trust each other, an account that serves as another treatise to discourage women from forming large powerful groups. The terrifying dragon image of the Gorgons' snake-filled hair and gaping mouths may also result from men's fear of reprisals from women who were confined and controlled by their husbands and sons. When these women congregated for a childbirth or funeral they undoubtedly spoke to each other about their station in life. Perhaps the grotesque Amazon and the Gorgon imagery served as both expressions of the anger of women and as warnings to wives and daughters to be agreeable else they too will become grotesque.

Critics have linked Medusa in semiotic discourse to both the phallic and the castrating woman. Freud argues that the mythological creation, Medusa's head, can be "traced back to the same *motif* of fright at castration" (Strachey 24: 24). He states that the snakes represent pubic hair and her mouth, a devouring vagina, which is a representation of the fear that angry women will castrate or murder the men with whom they are angry.

Avenging women and children are also a common theme in Greek drama. In Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, written in the sixth century B.C., Clytemnestra, with her lover Aegisthus, avenges the sacrificial murder of her daughter, Iphigenia, by her husband, Agamemnon. In the midst of his heroic return from the Trojan War, Clytemnestra stabs Agamemnon and his lover, Cassandra, with a phallic knife while they are bathing. Agamemnon's son, Orestes, in an attempt to avenge his father's death, kills his mother, Clytemnestra. In turn, he is pursued by the Furies until he goes to trial before Apollo. Apollo's judgment reflects a misogynist view of the mother when he states only a father can be a parent, a notion that existed until the ovum was discovered a hundred years ago:

"The mother of what is called her child is not its parent, but only the nurse of the newly implanted germ. the begetter is the parent, whereas she, as a stranger for a stranger, doth but preserve the sprout, except God shall blight its birth. And I will offer thee a sure proof of what I say: fatherhood there may be, when mother there is none." (Or. 658-663)

Although strange birth and sexual images were ubiquitous in written Greek mythology, drama, and philosophy, extant illustrations are rare. Maybe visual depictions of birth were an unspoken taboo in their culture. When Greece became a Christian state, many artistic images were left to the elements, others were removed and recycled for building materials, and some were destroyed by the zealous Christians. Currently, the Vatican in Rome contains many of the original Greek statuary, but what was lost is unknown. Extant artistic representations from ancient Greece tend to involve phallic imagery in both male and female depictions: swords, knives, snakes, staffs, flutes, and pillars (fig. 11, 12). The majority of images that could be described as vaginal come from the Classical Period and feature sphinxes and gorgons, or sometimes women with wild animals or other toothy creatures (fig 13, 14).



7.28 Mourning Athena relief, from Athens, c. 470 BC.
Marble. Height 19 ins (48 cm). Acropolis Museum, Athens

Figure 11. *Mourning Athena* relief



Figure 12. Varvakeion statuette



Figure 13. Sphinx



Figure 14. Goddess and Bull

Another curiosity of extant female statuary is the exclusion of the female genitalia. The women are featured fully clothed from at least the waist down, which could be interpreted as a fear and/or loathing of the vagina. For example, the Ludovisi Throne relief of the birth of Aphrodite (fig. 15), the goddess of sexual intercourse, only shows the goddess's torso, head, and arms. Two of the five women in the relief help Aphrodite out of the water and drape a towel across her waist. As a result, the female genitals of the Greek sex goddess are excluded just as they are in most female portraiture from the High Classical Period (fig. 16). However, two other women in the relief are depicted with a phallic flute and an incense burner on a phallic pedestal. None of the women are depicted with genitalia. During this period Polykleitos' *Kanon* describes the ideal proportions of the standing male—not female—figures. *Kanon* even suggested proper proportions for the male genitalia, which is ubiquitous in High Classical Greek art (fig. 17, 18, 19). The absence of female genitalia, together with the ubiquity of male genitalia in art, seems to indicate a discomfort with the sexualized female.

Ambivalence toward the female role in society is also played out in the discourse of the two premier philosophers of Classical Greece—Plato and Aristotle. Plato's *Republic* features a utopian government that Socrates thought would be perfect. In Book V, Plato addresses the problem of women. In it Socrates says that they must live separately from their husbands and their children. Certain women would work with the children and love all children as their own. Socrates implies that men and women are equal when he recommends that both gender hold positions of authority, work in similar jobs, and attend gymnasium.

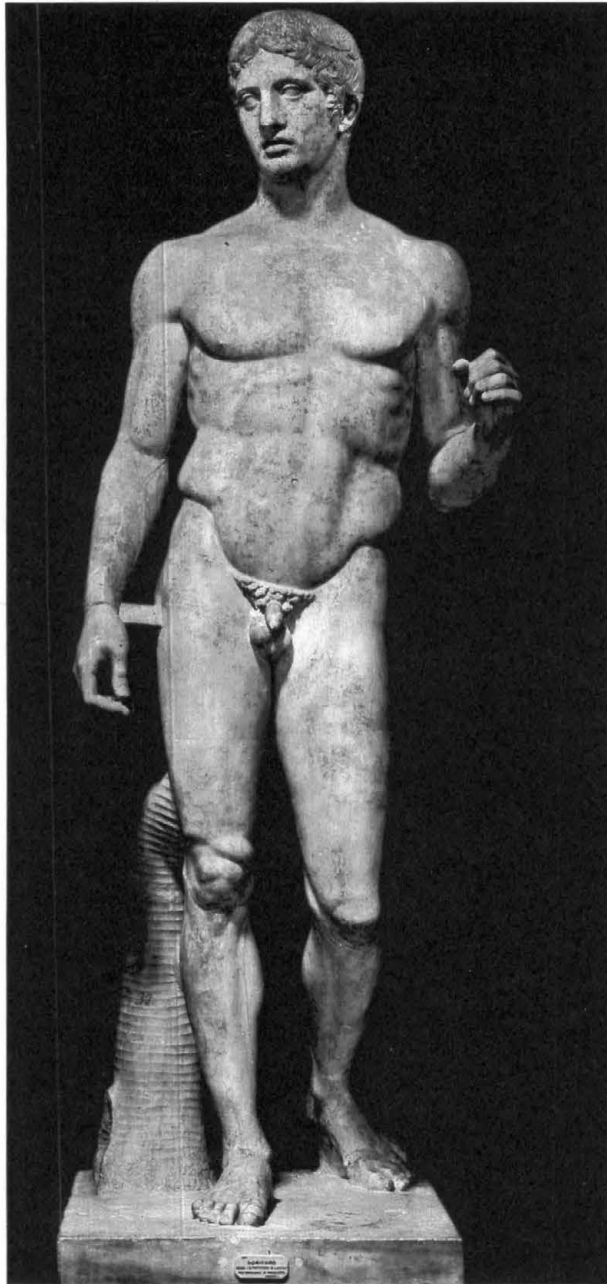
However, Aristotle took a very different position. He wrote that the inferiority of slaves and women was innate. It could not be cured. Non-Greeks might be teachable, but this was risky. Aristotle therefore cautioned his pupil Alexander to prohibit his captains from intermarrying with barbarians, lest the virus of inferiority



Figure 15. Ludovisi Throne relief of the birth of Aphrodite



Figure 16. *Nike* relief



8.39 Doryphoros by Polykleitos, from Pompeii. Roman copy of a bronze Greek original of c. 440 BC. Marble. Height 6 ft 11 ins (2.12 m). National Museum, Naples

Figure 17. Polykleitos' *Doryphoros*



Figure 18. *Antikythera* Bronze

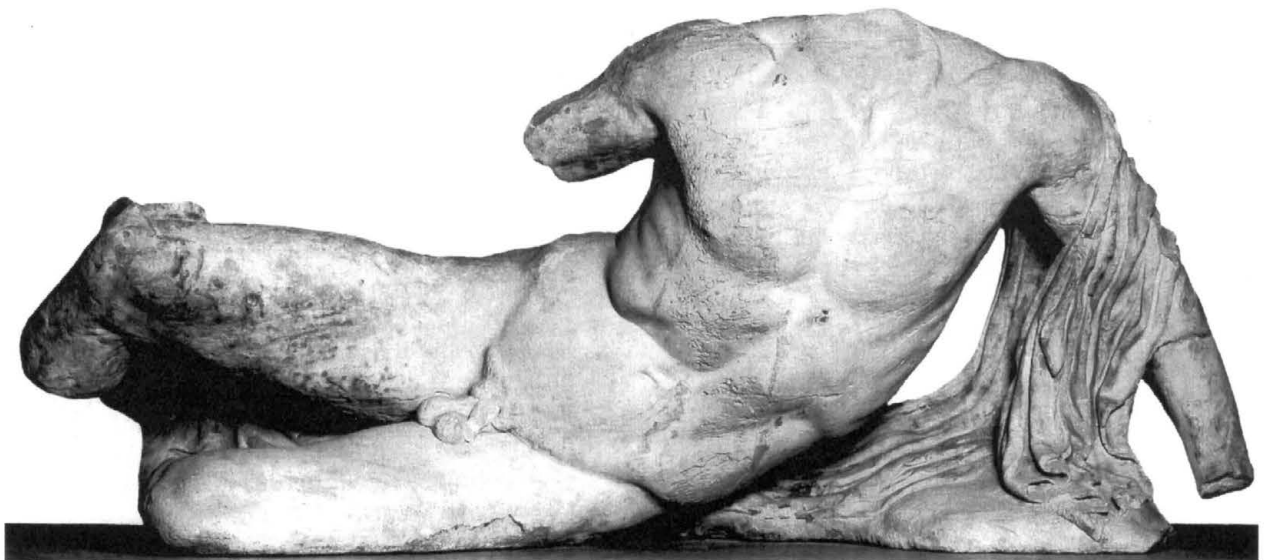


Figure 19. Male nude statue fragment

infect the superior race. Modern day historian Charles Van Doren argues that such circularity of reasoning survives to our day:

When one holds that women, or blacks, or homosexuals, or Hispanics, or the poor, or natives—you name it—are treated as inferiors because they are inferior, one is really thinking along the same lines. There is a name for this kind of logic, given to it by Aristotle himself: the "fallacy of the consequent" (45).

Although Plato's and Aristotle's treatises on gender relations disagree, what is significant for this analysis is that both philosophers considered the topic of gender relations an important part of obtaining a perfect utopian government. Apparently, these were indeed issues within Greek society which implies that some women in Greek society possessed intellect, opinions, and the power that comes from having those qualities acknowledged. Otherwise the topic of gender would have been excluded from such important treatises.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTH OF A NATION: ANCIENT ROME

*Why should I tell of philtres, spells, and deadly concoctions given to stepsons?
Women commit more serious crimes at the bidding of sex; lust itself is the least of
their sins.*

—Juvenal A.D. 116

Because of their advanced society, the ancient Greeks' trade and travel with other countries resulted in cultures such as Rome incorporating Greek ideas, inventions, and religion. Rome and Greece even shared the same gods. For example, the Greek Aphrodite became the Roman Venus, Athena became Demeter, Zeus became Jupiter, and Hestia became Vesta. Roman religion also contained myriad other gods that were not generally acknowledged by Greeks. These auxiliary gods were probably integrated into the Roman religion when people came from all over Europe to live in Rome, a major metropolitan area. Alterations in the Greek mythology came from and led to subtextual messages within Roman myths that differed from those that can be read into in Greek mythology.

For example, the ancient Romans' ambivalent attitudes toward women were first reflected in both versions of Rome's creation legend. The most common version follows: When he exiled his older brother, King Numitor of Alba Longa, the new King Amulius made Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silva, a Vestal Virgin so that she would not produce heirs to the throne. However, the god, Mars, ravished her and she gave birth to the twins Romus and Remus. Amulius imprisoned Rhea Silva and ordered the drowning of the infants. A she-wolf found the twins by the banks of the Tiber and suckled them. Another, less common version of the legend is recounted in Robert E. Bell's *Women of Classical Mythology*,

Romulus, the founder of Rome in 753 B.C., and his twin brother, Remus, were suckled by Luperca, "an ancient Italian divinity. [She] was the wife of Luperca and, in the shape of a she-wolf, performed the office of nurse to Romulus and Remus. In some accounts she was identified with Acca Larentia, the wife of the shepherd Faustulus. (284)

Both of these extant versions of this Roman myth include *vagina dentata* imagery. The indication that Remus and Romulus survive the *vagina dentata* of a wolf denotes his masculine strength. According to Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, such a proof of strength is an essential element within hero myths:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). (246)

It cannot be mere coincidence that during periods of prevalent *vagina dentata* imagery, women have become more vocal in ways that instill fear in their male counterparts. According to Gies,

Adult Roman women were virtually free from male guardianship; wives could divorce husbands; dowries were safeguarded; with some restrictions, girls could inherit equally with their brothers. Women had an important role in religion, sharing with their husbands the responsibility for supervising the household cult, serving as vestal virgins, and in some cases priestesses, and even conducting their own cults from which men were excluded. While they had no

political rights, and could not hold office or serve on councils, they often exerted significant influence through their husbands. . . . Upper-class Roman women were educated. Calpurnia, the wife of Pliny the Younger (A.D. c. 61-c. 113), possessed cultivated literary tastes, with a preference for the works of her husband. "She sings my verses and set them to her lyre with no other master but Love, the best instructor," wrote her gratified husband. (14).

The Vestal Virgins were the only women given a status as high as men; however according to Tannahill, they were oftentimes scapegoated during periods of turmoil:

. . . Vesta, guardian of the hearth and household and for many centuries the well-being of the state was thought to depend on the diligence with which the Vestal Virgins, her priestesses, tended the sacred fire. There were only six Vestals, chosen by lot from a short list of candidates culled from the noblest Roman families. . . . The Vestal was enrolled at the age of ten or less (when she could still be guaranteed Virginal) and was committed to religious chastity for the next 30 years. . . . Her morals were a matter of national importance. When Rome suffered disaster at Cannae in 216 B.C., the blame was placed not on military incompetence but on erring Vestals. Two were denounced and condemned. A century later, all six were declared corrupt, and three were found guilty of having surrendered their virginity. The penalty was a lingering death, immured in a small underground chamber with a bed, a lamp, and a few days' food (116-117).

This kind of scapegoating of powerful women occurred among the royal family as well. During the first century A.D., Roman records report several alleged instances of women committing heinous acts against men. These records show that around A.D. 4, Empress Livia was accused of killing her two of her husband's

(Emperor Augustus's) sons. Later in A.D. 48, Emperor Claudius's wife, Agrippina the Younger was accused of conspiring to poison Claudius twice because the first time she was unsuccessful. Tannahill argues that in these cases as well as others, the men probably died from salmonella bacterium poisoning (125). Nonetheless, the assumption that women were responsible for these deaths is an indication of the heightened male distrust of Roman women that Karl Jung's *Man and His Symbols* would argue was reflected in prevailing imagery found in Rome's architectural monuments:

The experienced investigator of the mind can similarly see the analogies between the dream pictures of modern man and the products of the primitive mind, its 'collective images,' and its mythological motifs (Jung 57).

Jung also asserts that symbols are timeless, that their meanings are a part of humanity's collective unconscious:

Although the specific shape in which they express themselves is more or less personal, their general pattern is collective. They are found everywhere and at all times, just as animal instincts vary a good deal in the different species and yet serve the same general purposes. We do not assume that each new-born animal creates its own instincts as an individual acquisition, and we must not suppose that human individuals invent their specific human ways with every new birth. Like the instincts, the collective thought patterns of the human mind are innate and inherited. They function, when the occasion arises, in more or less the same way in all of us. (Jung 64)

A symbolic pattern of vaginal imagery can be found in Roman's civil engineering that was constructed when the Roman Empire enjoyed a period of relative peace in the first century A.D. During this time, the Romans concentrated on the design and construction of architectural monuments, water systems, harbors, and highways that continue to affect contemporary urban design.

Vestiges of ancient Rome style can be found today in contemporary Western art and culture because of its durability, functionality, and semiology.

In A.D. 70, Emperor Vespasian ordered the construction of the vulva-shaped (fig. 20) Flavian Amphitheatre, which was later called the Roman Colosseum. According to Brockett, the colosseum was completed and inaugurated under Titus's rule in A.D. 80, during a one-hundred day event in which five thousand wild beasts were killed. Over the next four centuries, many more animals, as well as gladiators, hunters, Christians, and other prisoners were cruelly executed for sport (61). During sporting events in the amphitheatre, the crowd cheered as gladiators and wild animals tore their victims apart limb from limb. The combination of the pudenda shape of the Colosseum along with the large, toothy, dangerous animals and the water used to simulate a war at sea created a huge image of the *vagina dentata* that symbolized the inevitable hellish death awaiting the loser of the game.

The Roman desire for reality-based entertainment was incorporated into sophisticated set designs, working elevators, and special effects used during various staged events, such as wild animal hunts and gladiatorial combats, creating a heightened sense of reality and verisimilitude (Brockett 61). However, the feminine shape of the Colosseum undoubtedly reflected the misogynous attitudes of the male magistrates who approved productions and distributed money to cover expenses (Brockett 62).

The amphitheatre's verisimilitude was created by utilizing *vagina dentata* imagery in order to reflect the seduction of power and death that the Colosseum represented to the Roman people and to give expression to various anxieties about the future of Rome. According to Tannahill, in ancient Rome, seduction, power, and death, were all linked to the feminine:

The emancipated woman of early imperial Rome had much in common with the more competitive type of feminist today—a peremptory mind, a

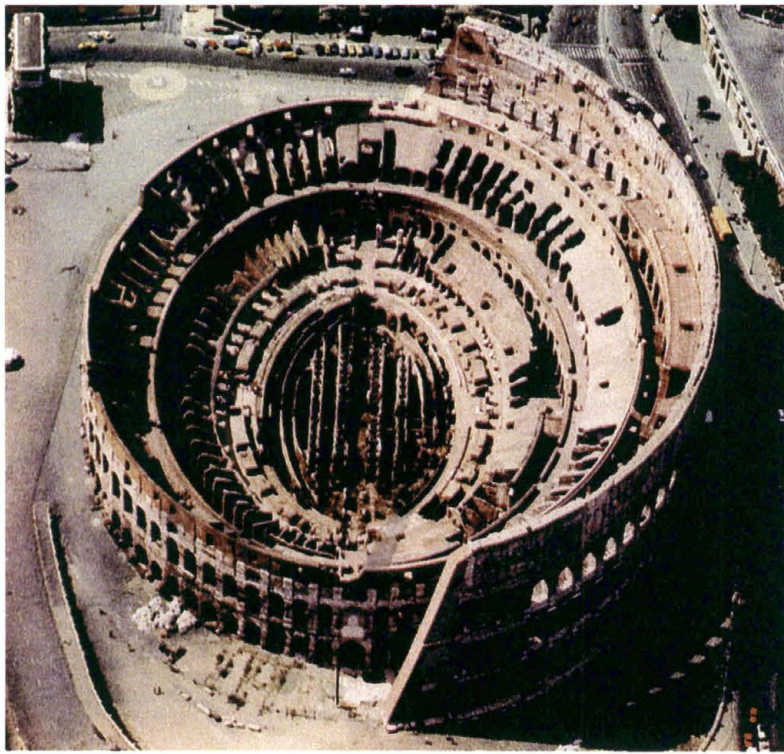


Figure 20. Flavian Amphitheater



Figure 21. Roman Pantheon

domineering manner, and a wholehearted contempt for moderation.

Socially, her husband was just as hard to take; selfish to a marked degree, intellectually finicky, prone to moralize, lacking in imagination, and with a sense of humor as subtle as custard pie. Husbands and wives, in effect, were no more compatible than they had ever been, but because there were more women of positive character in Rome than anywhere else in the ancient world, the sound of mismatched personalities grating together was painfully audible" (Tannahill 122).

In response to social upheaval, Roman society gave birth to the desire for womb-like bliss, a longing for heaven that can be found in the Pantheon (fig. 21), a structure which *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* describes as having the peacefulness of a womb:

[The rotunda] is a space in which light is used not just to illuminate the darkness but to create drama and underscore the symbolism of the interior shape. On a sunny day the light that passes the oculus forms a circular beam on the coffered dome, a disk of light that moves across the dome in the course of the day [has a] sudden cool, calm, and mystical immensity. . . . The design is based on the "intersection of two circles (one horizontal, the other vertical), so that the interior space may be imagined as the orb of the earth and the dome as the vault of the heavens" (234).

This structure built in the shape of the *vagina fecunda* was later dedicated in A.D. 608 by Pope Boniface to *Santa Maria ad Martyres*, a choice quite appropriate to its design. The cunic images used in both the Flavian Amphitheatre and Hadrian's Pantheon set standards in architecture that still exist today in theatres, domed stadiums, and cathedrals. As a result, there are many remnants of ancient Rome in contemporary Western art and culture, although between the fall of Rome and the stirrings of the Renaissance in medieval Europe, humanity muddled

through the Dark Ages, when it seems that culture took a back seat first to poverty and ignorance, then fell completely around the sixth century A.D. after several epidemics of what is thought to have been measles, small pox, and bubonic plague that substantially decreased Europe's population from the second to the sixth centuries A.D. (Gottfried 5-7)

CHAPTER V

THE BIRTH OF MISOGYNY: MEDIEVAL FRANCE AND ENGLAND

"Women have been burnt as witches simply because they were beautiful."

—*Simone de Beauvoir*

In medieval Europe, Christian art and literature began to depict, both in covert and overt ways two primary female archetypes from Christianity, the Temptress Eve and the Virgin Mary. As early as the twelfth century A.D., Christian art employed images of the *vagina fecunda* and the *vagina dentata* to reinforce ambiguous attitudes about women, sex, marriage, and death implied by the Judeo-Christian Bible through highly symbolic tales involving women.

Prior to the European Black Death, ambiguous attitudes toward women may have sprung out of men's fear of strong women such as Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, who ruled from Winchester Palace and, according to Marion Meade, was "essentially a person of independent temperament" (202). Early in the marriage, she had "an obsessive need for meaningful work. . . [and] had proved herself an efficient executive, a wife of unswerving loyalty who would dedicate herself to implementing policies that her brilliant young husband had devised" (202-203).

Later her "unswerving loyalty" turned into contempt after "Henry had edged Eleanor further and further from the high place where he sat, and now, to add a gratuitous insult, he publicly honored a concubine, installing her in a palace where the queen had been undisputed mistress" (Meade 238). In 1174, she conspired with French lords against Henry II, the heir to her husband's throne, on behalf of her more favored sons, Richard and Geoffrey. As a result, a "few Poitevins still loyal to Henry" captured her when she disguised herself as a man and attempted to flee Poitiers. She was locked away in the Tower of London and various other castles for fifteen years (Meade 274).

Eleanor's—and other women's—confinement is reflected in the Jaws of Hell, an illustration featured in the *Winchester Psalter* dated circa 1180 (fig. 22), which features St. Michael locking the chastity belt gate on the toothy hellmouth of a pitiful monster with sad eyes and a dopey clitoral nose—a pathetic *vagina dentata*. This laughable monster cannot even cause pain to her victims, some of whom appear to be bored and loafing. *The Jaws of Hell* not only serves to ridicule feminine power, but also warns that the vagina is the gate to hell that must be locked to prevent eternal damnation via pleasurable sexual intercourse.

Since fornication for reasons other than procreation was generally considered sinful, courtly love became the means to satisfy the need for excitement in an age when prearranged marriage was the custom. Therefore, the genesis of courtly love and the expansion of Mariolatry, the medieval worship of the Virgin Mary, was almost simultaneous:

The Virgin became *Notre Dame*, *Our Lady*, a stately and unmistakably aristocratic figure much more at home in the princely courts of the West than she would ever have been in the inn in Bethlehem (Tannahill 270).

By the thirteenth century, poets and troubadours had begun melding the Virgin with the Lady:

The troubadours never sang of love consummated. Some explicitly disclaimed any desire to possess their ladies. Others, stretching credibility, sang of a chastity that could survive any test. . . . [Their songs indicated that there was] no harm or danger in embraces, kisses, even in passing the night in bed (talking) with the beloved (Tannahill 265).

Worship of the Lady found its way into German thought, work, and deed as theatre troupes traveled throughout Europe performing comedies and drama that eventually influenced Elizabethan theatre. (Brockett 85) These troupes influenced German *minnesingers*, which literally means "singer of love songs." German



Figure 22. Winchester Psalter's *Jaws of Hell*

minnesingers Heinrich von Meissen, Walther von der Vogelweide, and Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote lyric poetry modeled on the poetry of the Provençal troubadours with an emphasis on religious allusion and symbolism. *Minnesinger* Heinrich Frauenlob von Meissen, called *Frauenlob*, meaning "praise of women" used the word *Frau* for woman rather than the word *Weib* (meaning *wife*) in his poetry (Trager 79), a linguistic shift that defined woman as independent from her husband.

The *frau's* strength and beauty is depicted in the 1330 German stained-glass image (fig. 23), which has Mary and Jesus encased in an anatomically correct—complete with clitoris—*vagina fecunda* or *vesica piscis*. Mary and the dawdling Christ-child are in a power struggle; however, Mary, the dominant, larger image, will win the struggle as she pulls the Jesus by the hand while she looks at Him sternly but lovingly. She is the perfect mother and product of Mariolatry.

Mariolatry quickly turned into misogyny when the Bubonic Plague pandemics caused the death of roughly forty-five percent of the population of Europe between 1348 and 1351, when the more pious embraced a fundamental Christianity that exalted virginity and denounced sex because they feared the wages of sin, especially illicit sex with women, would lead to death and a hellish afterlife. Some even went so far as to say that sexual purity was the most important of all virtues:

By some mysterious alchemy, sexual purity came to neutralize other sins, so that even the moral oppression and physical barbarity that became characteristic of the Christian church in later medieval and Renaissance times scarcely appeared as sins at all in comparison with the sins of sex and heresy. (Tannahill 161).

However, their supposed celibacy did not save the clergy's idealized selfless image after they fled cowardly, leaving no one to offer services, deliver last rites, or



Figure 23. German stained glass image of Virgin and Jesus

comfort the sick. Also, "the church supervised the education and licensing of physicians, almost all of whom were clerics. . . . As the church would have taken credit had its physicians been able to assuage the pain of plague, so it was to shoulder much of the blame when they failed" (Gottfried 84).

Afterward, horrific vaginal imagery was used for visual representations of hell in mystery plays that served to educate an illiterate congregation. Produced by local churches, these plays featured "true drama, with actors, dialogue, and a story line" (Turner 114). Reaching their height of popularity throughout Europe in the middle fifteenth century, many featured elaborate sets that included Hellmouths (fig. 24), a symbol of the *vagina dentata*, that opened to reveal Lucifer and the damned that in a way served to project evil onto women accused of casting spells of Black Death, which German's Kramer and Sprenger later described in their handbook for witchhunting, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), published at the request of Bishop Innocent VIII:

But there is no bodily infirmity, not even leprosy or epilepsy, which cannot be caused by witches, with God's permission [and] that, without the use of any poison, but by the mere virulence of their incantations, they can deprive men of their lives. (134)

The Malleus Maleficarum merely recapitulates the ongoing process of witchtrials and subsequent burnings that had steadily increased since 1360, after the "first shock" of the Black Death of 1347-1349 had worn off. According to Russell, "these psychic epidemics increased in numbers and frenzy as the fourteenth century went on, an indication of widespread social and cultural maladjustment" (200). Russell reports other possible causes for the "witchcraze of 1360-1427:

These movements, which swept the Low Countries, Germany, and northern France in 1374 and continued at least until 1420, were more than responses to plagues and famines; they were manifestations of the misery and fear



Figure 24. Hellmouth

caused by uncontrollable and unpredictable change in a Christian society in which change was not valued. (200)

Kahn explains that women healers were often burned as witches because of "their knowledge in the areas of contraception and abortion" in a pronatal milieu as well as the fear that they could render men impotent. (183-184) However, many extraordinary women were burned as witches simply because they did not conform to society's norm. Beauty, intellect, knowledge, intuition, and strength were all considered abnormal traits in a woman and were punished into submission (de Beauvoir 191).

The Black Death's reduction in the population afterwards contributed to economic affluence throughout the continent. The survivors could get higher wages for labor that was greatly in demand. According to Charles Van Doren, plague survivors inherited more money and property than they could use from the uncountable deceased. Their newfound wealth sent survivors "on one of history's great spending sprees" (152), and widows inherited not only wealth but also power when they took over their dead husbands' fields; craftsmen's wives inherited shops, tools, and apprentices; landowner's widows discovered the opportunities as well as problems, of management responsibility. Some widows used their wealth to attract youthful suitors. Others, more materialistic or less romantic, used remarriage to increase their wealth (Gies 232).

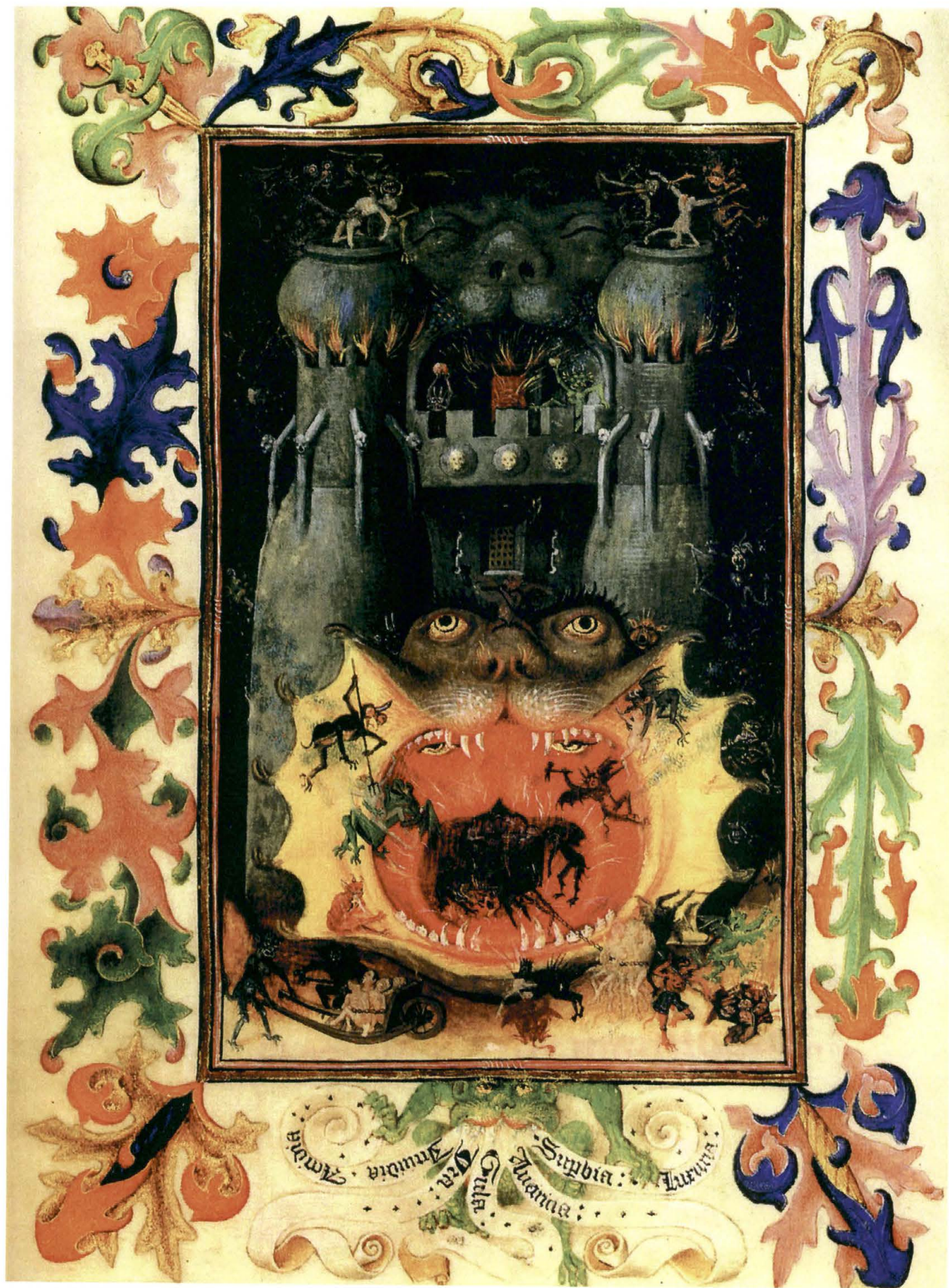
Undoubtedly because of their increased power, widows were most frequently accused and burned as witches (Jong 39). The clergy continued to preach that sexual intercourse with a witch—sometimes defined as any woman who desired sexual intercourse—would lead straight to hell. During this era, according to Erica Jong's *Witches*, as many as a half a million women—and occasionally men—died painfully after confessing to heresy or witchcraft under hideous torture (39) although others give a more conservative estimate of death

tolls amounting to anywhere from forty to two-hundred fifty thousand. (Briggs 260, Robbins 180)

Fifteenth century French artisans immortalized the witchburnings in their renderings of hell printed in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (fig. 25), a richly illuminated Dutch Book of Hours that features a burning hell with two mouths. The mouth on the bottom appears to be a *vagina dentata* with its labia spread and pinned. This image is both frightening and pathetic. The teeth look dangerous, but the pins appear painful, much like the sadistic torture of a witch burning at the stake: deadly and seductive, yet finally caught.

In 1431, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake as a heretic on charges that included "inappropriate physical appearance: 'Not only did she wear short tunics, but she dressed herself in tabards and garments open at the sides. . . and her hair was cropped round in a man's style.'" Never mind that she changed the course of history when she answered her own intuition—that was later determined to be demonic voices—and liberated Orleans from English occupation by leading four thousand men into battle (Trager 89). The fear of female warriors such as Joan of Arc is represented in the late-fifteenth-century French *Diablerie* (fig. 26), which features a female demon aggressor with a phallic saber, cracked nipples, a large toothy crotch, and a clitoral nose, an image that appears to express Medieval anxiety regarding Joan of Arc's demise.

The fear that witches could cause sexual impotence seemed to incite great fear in their male contemporaries as evidenced in myriad texts on the subject starting with Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Quodlibet XI*, dated circa 1260, up to and including Kramer and Sprenger's *The Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1487. This doubtless resulted in a castration anxiety that manifested itself in artistic representations of hell that are unmistakably images of the *vagina dentata*,



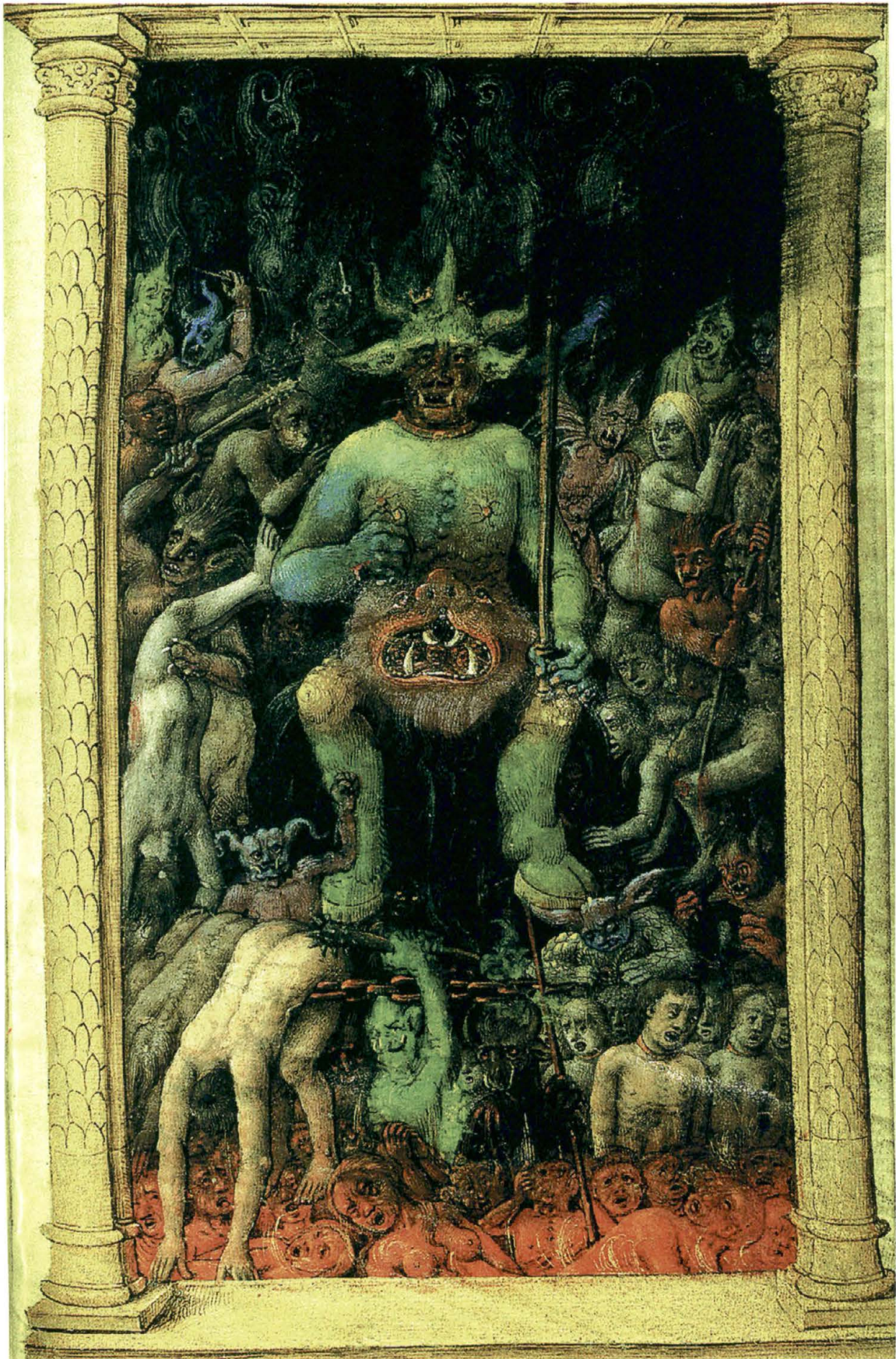


Figure 26. *Diablerie*. Artist unknown. (France 15th century).

although direct cause and effect are difficult to determine given that scant reliable information is available from a mostly illiterate culture.

Considering the fact that the artists who illustrated the psalters, hours, Bibles, and cathedrals are unknown to the modern scholar, it is difficult to determine the sources of these images. Perhaps the artists included pagan references in Christian art because they were expressing their own religion and beliefs, just as Christmas and Easter holidays coincided with the timing of pagan festivals. In a similar vein, a Christian icon, the *vesica pesca*, seems to have pagan roots, according to Barbara Walker:

The *vesica pesca* was an unequivocally genital sign of the *sheila-na-gig* (fig. 27) figures of Irish churches built before the sixteenth century. The squatting naked Goddess displayed her vulva as a vesica. . . . The pointed-oval fish sign was even used by early Christians to represent the mystery of God's union with his mother-bride—which is why Jesus was called 'the little Fish' in the Virgin's fountain (Walker 1983 1045).

Therefore, many of the symbols found in medieval Christian imagery might have been placed there by pagan artists, who either consciously or unconsciously placed images from their own religions. These pagan images melded with Christian ideology and eventually became part of modern religious iconography.

SHEILA-NA-GIG



Figure 27. *Sheila-na-gig*

CHAPTER VI

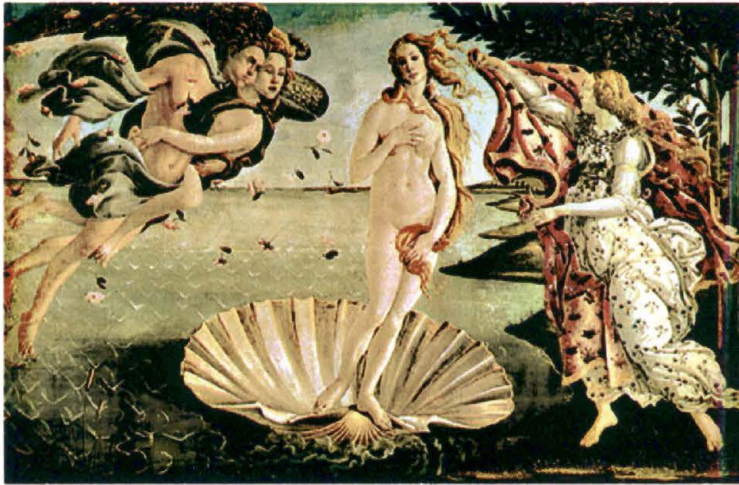
THE BIRTH OF KNOWLEDGE: THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

"There have been two knowledge explosions in human history, not just one. The second began in Europe four or five centuries ago and is still going on. The first began in Greece during the sixth century B.C.":

--Charles Van Doren

Much of the art of the Italian Renaissance took its roots from pre-Christian Greek classics. According to Charles Van Doren, July 20, 1304, the birthdate of Francesco Petrarch, whose death marked the beginning of the Renaissance because he spent most of his seventy-year life span as a classical scholar and poet laureate of Rome. (130) According to Burckhardt, Petrarch commissioned a Calabrian Greek, Leonzio Pilato and Giovanni Boccaccio to translate various Greek texts into their own contemporary Italian vernacular. (122) Afterwards, the birth imagery in Greek classics and mythology arose in fifteenth-century Italian visual art found in cathedrals and palaces (see Chapter III). Before Johann Gutenberg invented the movable-type press around 1448, these rare and expensive translations of classic Greek texts were owned mostly by the wealthy, educated nobility such as Ludovico Gonzaga, the Marquis of Mantua. The study of humanism and antiquity gave rise to birth symbolism, of which examples can be found in his ducal palace and in cathedrals, perhaps because second- and third-born sons of nobility typically became cardinals and bishops in the Catholic church. Afterwards, birth imagery that refers to Greek classics and mythology began to surface in the frescoes and paintings of Italy—Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (fig. 28) for example—nearly one century after Petrarch and Boccaccio "talked about a rebirth of learning and plotted its success" (Van Doren 133).

In the *Birth of Venus*, Botticelli imitated the Greek style of covering the female pubic area (figs. 15 & 16), although Herbert Horne noted that the artist painted



COLORPLATE 12. Renaissance, SANDRO BOTTICELLI *Birth of Venus*. After 1482. Paint on canvas, 59" x 92".
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

Figure 28. Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*



Figure 29. Pinacoteca at Bologna's *Last Judgment*

many other completely nude women. He records that Botticelli's contemporaries wrote these risqué works were enjoyed in homes throughout Florence. (153) However, when Girolamo Savonarola's rebellion forced the Medici's out of Florence, the Puritanistic faction burned many of Botticelli's paintings in what was later called Savonarola's Bonfire of the Vanities. Perhaps the *Birth of Venus* survived the Bonfire because the subject modestly covers her pubis with her hair.

Unfortunately, between the life spans of Francesco Petrarch and Sandro Botticelli came several epidemics of the Black Plague, which began in Florence and moved north throughout all of Europe. During this time, Boccaccio retreated for the country and wrote *The Decameron*, which cited three basic reactions to the Black Death:

[Some people] maintained that there was no better medicine against the plague than to flee from it; and convinced of this reasoning, not caring about anything but themselves, men and women in great numbers abandoned the city. . . . [Many] . . . thought that living moderately and avoiding all superfluity might help a great deal in resisting this disease. . . Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking too much, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease. (Kolve 238-239).

In the decades after the first Black Death epidemic in 1348, the Renaissance in Italy was delayed for a few generations when anxieties and fears arose in that society's collective unconscious. (Jung 57) These emotions were projected onto women as evidenced in the fifteenth century Christian art frequently equating hell with the *vagina dentata* (fig. 25, 26). During this time of transition, Medieval Gothic art gradually became melded with that of the Early Renaissance.

An excellent example of this transitional art, the anonymous post-plague fourteenth century painting of the Last Judgment, located in the Pinacoteca at Bologna (fig 29) contains two birth images that depict heaven as a *vesica piscis* framed with infant heads, imagery typical in Renaissance art; however, the *vagina dentata* image of hell leans toward the earlier Gothic art of the medieval period.

This *vagina fecunda* opening of heaven contains images representing Jehovah, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. Below, hell's entrance is represented by a bestial, shackled, hairy, female demon giving birth to the souls of the damned from toothy oral and vaginal openings simultaneously, while other similar demons throw them into boiling witches' cauldrons. In between, myriad judges sit with books and scrolls watching the heavenly, vaginal, wound bleed through purgatory and into hell.

Although death and the afterlife were primary concerns during the pandemics of bubonic plague, afterwards procreation and childbirth became a primary focus when up to two-thirds of Europe's population resulting in a need to repopulate. At this time, women began to attain a more valued position in the Italian collective unconscious. During the fifteenth century "highly placed women patrons supported authors, artists, musicians, poets, and learned men [such as] Boccaccio and Alvaro de Luna, [whose works were] dedicated to the Florentine noblewoman Andrea Acciaiuoli and to Doña María, first wife of King Juan II of Castile." (Agrippa von Nettesheim xxiii). Obviously, if the artists wanted to keep the patronage of these powerful women, it was necessary to please them with their art.

Andrea Mantegna was court painter to the Gonzaga family from 1460 until his death in September 1506. Ludovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, and his wife, Barbara of Brandenburg, commissioned Mantegna to paint the *Camera Magna Picta* more commonly known as *Camera degli Sposi*, the Bridal Chamber. According to Christiansen, Mantegna began his work on the ceiling *oculus* (fig. 30),



Figure 30. Andrea Mantegna's *Camera degli Sposi*

"proceeded to the fireplace wall, and then worked clockwise, finishing with the wall showing a distant landscape" (74) Most scholars agree that the *Camera degli Sposi* was painted slowly from 1465, the year the lime was purchased for the paint, until 1474, the date on the dedicatory tablet that dedicates his enormously understated "*opus hoc tenue*," or "slight work," to "the illustrious Ludovico, second Marquis of Mantua, best of princes and most unvanquished in faith, and for his illustrious wife, Barbara, incomparable glory of womankind" (Christiansen 86) (Cordaro 17) (Ady 35).

The *camera* served a dual purpose as the Marquis's own "nuptial chamber" (Ady 35) and as a place for handling affairs of government (Cardaro 19). Mantegna's genius "transformed the small room [into] a living record of the Gonzaga family (Ady 35). The fantastic *oculus* was situated directly over the bed, becoming a "continuation of the space occupied by the observer" (Cordaro 25) The observers, newlyweds, gazed at the circular birth image—*vagina fecunda*—of the heavens in which Mantegna paid homage to the Roman Pantheon (Christiansen 32), although the *oculus* is an illusion rather than the actual opening of the Pantheon.

According to Tansey, the *oculus's* illusory sky was designed to imitate the Italian tradition of playing practical jokes on newlyweds. (726) A group of three laughing women peer down at the wedding bed while a dark-skinned, grinning Moor contemplates pulling out the stick on which a basket containing greenery and fruit balances dangerously overhead. The *oculus* also contains a peacock that may symbolize the mythological Juno, bride of Jupiter, who "presides over lawful marriages" (Tansey 726-727). It also shows a woman wearing on her head a bridal veil while she gazes upward into the heavens. The circular space is filled with ten male *puttis* or infant angels who are unhappily borne into the image from painted, illusory balustrade in the side of the opening. As they climb toward

heaven, two congratulate themselves. One places a laurel wreath on his head while another brandishes a phallic stick that is either a pea-shooter or a flute. The third *putti*, who has already reached the top, seems to be giving instructions to the other seven who struggle in their ascension.

Most scholars find the *oculus* the most mysterious image in the *Camera degli Sposi*, a room containing several murals painted by Mantegna. The frescoes throughout the room contain scenes from life at the *Palazzo Ducale*; however, the scene in the *oculus* remains relatively unexplained. Scholars have had difficulty determining the personage of the practical jokesters who gaze at the newlyweds from above.

Perhaps they are the numerous recently dead, living happily in the afterlife while playing tricks on the living. According to Simon, the 1450s were fraught "with intervals of plague and inclement weather" (40) that caused death to a large percentage of the population of Mantua; therefore, this post-plague, pro-natalist society created a demand for healthy male children to repopulate, carry on the family name, and command a large dowry for marriage. (Simon 52) According to Masacchio, naked little boys in birthing and bridal chamber art "can be seen as indirect evidence of the Renaissance belief in the power of sympathetic magic in childbirth" (47-48). Well known in the Renaissance was the "second-century gynecological treatise by Soranus, and the fifth-century treatise *Against Julian* by St. Augustine . . . which described a deformed Cyprian tyrant who made his wife look at beautiful statues during intercourse to ensure that he would not father an equally misshapen child. As a result of this belief in the influence of physical surroundings, Renaissance bridal and birthing chambers were filled with statues, paintings, and decorative arts that depicted beautiful male babies and *puttis* that would supposedly promote healthy childbirth. (Masacchio 47).

As early as 1462, the year of their son's marriage contract that was signed in the *Camera degli Sposi*, Ludovico and Barbara began to plan the future *Camera picta*, "mentioned as *camera magna turris versus lacu de medio*" (Cordaro 225). They called together "weavers and decorators to embellish a special apartment" for their obese and humpbacked son's marriage to Margherita of the German duchy of Wittelsbach (Simon 48) in 1463. Since the Gonzaga family was cursed with an affliction that caused many of them to become humpbacked in their teens and twenties, they were especially concerned with producing the healthy male babies that were depicted as *putti* on the ceiling and walls of the *camera*.

As a matter of fact, at least three of Barbara's and Ludovico's children became afflicted not long before they were of marrying age. Consequently, one daughter, Susanna, was removed from her marriage contract to Galeazzo Maria, son of the Duke of Milan, and her name was substituted with that of her sister, Dorotea. Unfortunately, a rumor spread that Dorotea had one shoulder higher than the other, and the potential groom's father demanded a medical evaluation. The Gonzagas refused to have their daughter humiliated, and as a result, the contract was canceled because at that time "everyone knew that humpbacks bred humpbacks, who gave birth to lepers as well. (Whether a young prince was psychotic, syphilitic, or the carrier of hereditary deformities was rarely questioned.)" (Simon 50-51).

Federico, handsome and educated despite his deformity, was at first unhappy about his betrothal to Margherita because she was fat-faced, coarsely dressed, and spoke not a word of Italian, according to court reporters of the time. (Simon 48). Afterward, according to Kate Simon, people began to believe an "apocryphal story" about the young prince:

Federico fell profoundly in love with a local girl of humble origin and will not submit to life with an elderly—she was already eighteen—and unattractive

foreigner. His father insists that he be imprisoned until he comes to his senses, but his mother helps him escape, under the protection of six servants. On their way to shelter at the court of Naples, the band is robbed and the prince becomes very ill. . . . [Later] Federico is taken to the palace of Naples to be cared for, while his mother is apprised of his whereabouts and pitiable condition. She begs her husband. . . to bring their son back under peaceable terms. . . . Federico returns with his faithful men and begs pardon of his father. It is granted . . . and the devoted knights are generously rewarded. They become gentlemen of means, spoken of as "The Faithful," the ancestors of the long, honorable Mantuan family line of Fedeli. (48-49)

It is impossible to determine how much of this romantic rumor is true.

However, Simon states that Federico in fact married Margherita under duress in 1463 (49) and it is well-documented that the ceiling of the *Camera degli Sposi* was the area of the room painted first in a project that was planned in 1463 and was undertaken in 1465. Therefore, one can assume that Barbara of Brandenburg, Federico's mother, traveling diplomat, and woman of "vigorous character" (Ady 31) ordered this project to appease her son in his unhappy marriage with the hope that they would beget healthy male children. Indeed, the couple together produced six children, half of whom were male. One of their son's, Francesco, married Isabella D'Este, whose countless letters to Mantegna, giving him specific instructions on exactly what he should paint (Ady 31).

Throughout the Renaissance, women began to achieve a higher status in European society as evidenced by Madonna and Child art by artists such as Raphael (fig. 31), Parmigianino (fig. 32), and Lippi (fig. 33). Later, in the Baroque and Rococo periods, artists such as Van Dyke, Bronzino, and Velazquez painted portraits of women posing pregnant or with their children—even their female children.



Figure 31. Raphael's *Madonna and Child*



Figure 32. Francesco Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck*

Madonna and Child

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI, c. 1452; panel, diameter 83 in. (134.6 cm), Pitti Gallery, Florence

Fra Filippo Lippi was a monk yet he interprets his subject in a rather worldly manner. The interior is patterned on the home of a well-to-do Florentine, and scholars have speculated that the identity of the model for the Madonna was Lippi's own mistress, Lucretia.



Figure 33. Fra Fillipo Lippi's *Madonna and Child*

The portraits of women and children throughout Europe in the next two centuries are further evidence that pregnancy had become quite fashionable. During these periods, the stylish empire dresses were fashioned to give the appearance of pregnancy. In 1515, childbearing became so popular that Mary Tudor, widow of France's Louis XII, feigned pregnancy by wrapping towels around her waist and fainting in public. (Trager 105).

These portraits also represent female power during a time when many women had some control of expenditures in wealthy economies that arose from population decrease caused by the Black Death, a tragedy that also promoted the advancement of learning. According to Van Doren, the excess clothing that the living inherited from the plague victims was converted into paper. That paper was used in the moveable-type press to create copies of Bibles and other books that played a major role in the education of the public throughout the Renaissance and the Enlightenment period that followed.

When a society experiences a period of enlightenment, people tend to become hopeful about the future and therefore secure with keeping the gender balance. In these periods of expansion—during the prehistoric agronomist cultures, those of Classical Greece, the early Roman Republic, pre-plague Medieval Europe, the French and American Revolutions, and later—during the 1960s in Western societies—the visual arts include positive regenerative birth images as metaphors for the future.

CHAPTER VII

THE BIRTH OF INDUSTRY: THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

"The divine right of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger, and, though conviction may not silence many boisterous disputants, yet, when any prevailing prejudice is attacked, the wife will consider, and leave the narrow-minded to rail with thoughtless vehemence at innovation."

—Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

"With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet."

—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or,
The Modern Prometheus*

Historically, supernatural feminine sexual imagery in each century tends to represent a particular society's perceptions of its own contemporary women's movement and fear of future developments. Literature, art, and film focusing on birth imagery during these periods swing from the heavenly image of the vaginal birth—the expression of sacrificial love, redemption, and rebirth—to the *vagina dentata*—the fear of control, castration, and death. A novel written by a pregnant, unwed teenage girl during the Enlightenment exemplifies the era's anxiety about science and feminism, fears that helped spawn the Romantic movement in literature.

Since its publication in 1818, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* has fascinated audiences as evidenced in the myriad films produced based on the novel. However, most of these films have masculinized the feminine vision that undoubtedly stemmed from Mary Shelley's own experiences with childbirth, both as a mother and a daughter.

Mary Shelley's birth caused the death of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, whose essay, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, laid the groundwork for modern feminism. This work was well-known to young Mary Wollstonecraft, who endlessly read the works of both of her parents. As a matter of fact, Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* contends that she "may be said to have 'read' her family and to have been related to her reading, for books appear to have functioned as her surrogate parents, pages and words standing in for flesh and blood" (223).

Therefore, Shelley's novel is in part a treatise on how children suffer without a maternal element in their lives. Her father, William Godwin, after four years of mourning the death of Mary's mother, married Mary Jane Clairmont. According to Bennett and Robinson, the young Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and Mary Jane Clairmont Godwin "did not get on" (6). In an echo of her own childhood, Shelley's monster suffers because it has no mother.

Gilbert and Gubar also explain that the fact that Frankenstein's monster has no name is quite significant in Shelley's life:

. . . [T]he problem of names and their connection with social legitimacy had been forced into [Shelley's] consciousness all her life. As the sister of illegitimate and therefore nameless Fanny Imlay, for instance, she knew what bastardy meant, and she knew it too as the mother of a premature and illegitimate baby girl who died at the age of two weeks without ever having been given a name. (241-242)

The nameless creature retaliates against Dr. Frankenstein, his unnatural father and Modern Prometheus, when the doctor refuses to create a female companion for him. Although the monster begs and threatens, the doctor is afraid that she would become a modern Pandora, who would unleash evil into the world by giving birth to monstrous offspring.

Frankenstein is structured in a circular narrative that resembles *Paradise Lost*, Milton's famed poem, from which she quotes at the beginning of her novel. Shelley frames the novel with an icy, sterile, circular birth image that features Mr. Walton as the midwife, Victor Frankenstein as the father, and the creature as the fetus. The novel is told as a flashback, with Victor Frankenstein in St. Petersburg after traveling with "whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea" (Shelley 164). It ends with Victor "upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (165).

Shelley excludes an explicit description of the creature's birth, but instead using birth imagery, a wet, rainy night coupled with Victor's fatigue after the creature's birth:

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. (43)

Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* offers an explanation for the need to symbolically describe birth:

[I]t is proved that both sexes attempt, in the same way, to deny and disregard the female genitals, because both, regardless of sex, are subjected to the primal repression of the mother's genitals (38).

In the case of Mary Shelley, she was denied both a mother and motherhood prior to writing *Frankenstein*. Therefore, describing a birth using concrete terms rather than symbolic ones was probably too much for her to bear. However, she felt the need to create, hence her novel.

Shelley included water and fatigue in *Frankenstein's* birth chapter, images that are feminine literary tools.

Starting from the most primitive discoveries of culture such as fire and implements up to the most complicated technical machinery, it can be shown that these are not only made by man, but are also formed according to the image of man, whose anthropomorphic world view thus gains support (Rank 85).

The combination of the lack of a concrete birth in the novel and the desire to create technical machinery have resulted in male filmmakers repeatedly masculinizing the novel by adding machinery and lightning to the original story when adapting it to film. However, Shelley's novel pays homage to earlier feminist works.

Before Mary Shelley was born, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, along with Thomas Paine, Abigail Adams, Harriet Martineau, and many others wrote essays promoting the value and rights of women. These essays were published after John Locke and John-Jacques Rousseau asserted that "all men are created equal." Many women hoped that while their idealistic male counterparts achieved equality for themselves, women, too, would benefit. Shelley's *Frankenstein* implies that she privileged femininity and natural maternity over the masculine and mechanical creation.

Frankenstein is also an indictment of the scientific age, expressing the fear that science is a slave who will rebel against humanity—a theme that continues to run through much of the science fiction that the novel spawned. Fear of slaves had already been cultivated in the hearts of Europeans by the time of Shelley's writing. In the early nineteenth century, the English owned slaves throughout the colonized world. Slave uprisings were a constant fear among landed gentry. Therefore, the mechanized world offered a more efficient slave that was more productive than humans. Shelley's novel, however, expresses the fear that the newest slave, like its predecessors, will revolt against its master.

Frankenstein also implies that a child of male birth without maternal nurturing may become an inhuman abomination. Incorporating her mother's advocacy of women's rights, Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents an allegory valuing women for their ability to give their children humanity and implying that a man alone cannot create normal life. The novel is also a critique of the contemporary scientific community's *hubris*, in its desire to have machines replace employees, friends, women, and children. Living in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, the Romantics criticized mechanized "progress" and, therefore, preferred the natural over the artificial.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIRTH OF VAMPYRA: VICTORIAN ENGLAND

"The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth."

—Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)

During the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, many women joined the workforce despite low wages, long hours, and despicable working conditions. At this time, many feminists began to vehemently vocalize their desire for equal rights under the law; however, these efforts were squashed for over one hundred years by masculine backlash. For example, when newspapers of the late nineteenth century were filled with myriad rallies for women's suffrage, the Comstock Laws of 1872 were passed making interstate distribution of literature and devices for contraception and abortion illegal. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wrote and fought for women's rights, Dr. Robert Battey, a physician from Rome, Georgia, argued publicly for the removal of women's ovaries to "uproot and remove serious sexual disorders and re-establish . . . general health" (Trager 308). Drawing on Battey's theories, other doctors began to perform clitoridectomies for "nymphomania" and "excessive masturbation" (Trager 308). Further backlashing occurred after women began to organize hunger strikes to demand the right to vote when they were force-fed and otherwise humiliated in prison. Not surprisingly, in 1897 Bram Stoker's *Dracula* became an instant bestseller. The book's images of undead, fanged, sexually-hungry women seemed to mirror societal attitudes toward the women who desired more power, as well as a projection of the repressed sexuality that permeated Victorian society.

In Victorian England, prostitution flourished at an estimated one prostitute per twelve men between the ages of fifteen and sixty, and syphilis became epidemic (Tannahill 356, 365). During this time, doctors thought that gonorrhea was endemic in women and that vaginal discharges were evidence of disease believed to be caused by crowded city conditions, excessive masturbation, or exposure to the cold. (Trager 315) They believed that normal women had very little sexual appetite and those who desired sexual relations more than once or twice a month were considered animalistic.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud wrote that "[m]enstruation, especially its first appearance, is interpreted as the bite of some spirit-animal, perhaps as a sign of sexual intercourse with this ancestral spirit" (Strachey 6: 197). Freud's analyses were based on psychoanalytic sessions with men and women who suffered from psychological distress. Therefore, images of vampires with their bloody fangs seem to represent a fear of castration that arose from sexual ambivalence existing in the collective unconsciousness of the Victorian psyche. Based on these interviews and his own opinions, he called the female genitals the *unheimlich*, the uncanny. What was once *heimisch*, familiar, had been repressed:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning."
(Strachey 17: 245).

Within the novel's thematic framework, a sexualized female, Lucy Westenra, becomes a vampire after she professes in her letter to Mina Murray that she is "making fun of this great-hearted, true gentlemen" (68). She goes on to ask, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this

trouble?" (68). In her indiscriminate desire for many men, Lucy is the whore to Mina's madonna figure. According to Dijkstra, both women represent the "two faces of Eve" (344).

Charles Darwin's landmark *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, expresses the notion that "[m]an still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin" (ii, 405). In essence, man has vestiges of his animal ancestry. Under the influence of his own repressive culture, Darwin asserts that polygamy causes an increase in the percentage of female infants born to a tribe (ii, 303). As a result, he implies that polygamy is unnatural and barbaric. In order to be civilized, one must deny the instinct to have sexual relations outside of a monogamous marriage. Therefore, procreation with a prostitute or sexualized female—like Lucy Westenra—is bestial, a trait that could lead mankind back to his uncivilized, animalistic past. Dijkstra's 1986 analysis of *fin-de-siècle* culture asserts that bestial women brought out the beast in man:

The conjoining of bestial woman with the remnant of the beast in man could only spawn human animals, evil creatures from the distant past coming back to haunt civilization: hungry, half-human sphinxes, winged chimeras—blood-lusting vampires all. (335)

Early in Stoker's novel, Jonathan Harker is attacked by a group of female vampires at Dracula's castle. These women have "white sharp teeth" and "red tongues" that create a "churning sound" as they put their "hot breath on [Harker's] neck," while back in civilization Harker's fiancée, Mina, visits Lucy, who is having difficulty deciding whom to marry. Dijkstra remarks that "it is obvious that [Lucy] was specifically created to demonstrate how the polyandrous woman becomes man's conduit to the primal beast" (344).

All of the vampiresses in Stoker's novel cannibalize children. After Harker is attacked, Dracula reprimands the bestial, blood-sucking women and claims that

"This man belongs to me!" (47) After Lucy transforms from a flirtatious female to a lecherous vampiress and takes blood, which Dijkstra points out is symbolic semen, from each of her suitors, babies and children are found with their throats torn open on Hampstead Heath. Dijkstra draws a connection between the infanticide in the novel and the Women's Suffrage Movement of the late nineteenth century:

Woman's misplaced viraginity, that masculinizing force which in real life encouraged feminists to renounce the holy duties of motherhood and, as it were, prey upon their as yet unconceived babies, manifests itself henceforth in Lucy in the form of a determined blood lust for children. (345)

Dijkstra concludes his chapter entitled "Dracula and His Daughters" by stating that "*Dracula* is a very carefully constructed cautionary tale directed to men of the modern temper, warning them not to yield to the bloodlust of the feminist, the New Woman embodied by Lucy" (348). Therefore, the *vagina dentata* of the vampiresses and feminists coalesced into a negative image of women who did not fit the paradigm of the woman Victorian that G. T. W. Patrick describes in his article "The Psychology of Woman" in *Popular Science Monthly* (1895):

. . . [W]oman, representative of the past and future of humanity, whose qualities are concentration, passivity, calmness, and reserve of force, and upon whom, more than upon man, rest the burdens and responsibilities of the generations, is too sacred to be jostled roughly in the struggle of existence. . . . (Williams 11)

The male Victorian desire to reserve the "struggle for existence" to men appears in the first science fiction film, Georges Melies' *A Trip to the Moon*, or *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*, (1902) which creates symbolic associations between science and feminine sexuality that also embodied the male Victorian desire to reserve the "struggle for existence" to men. In the short film's opening sequence, an all-girl chorus line inserts a phallic rocketship into the moon launcher. The

chorus line is essentially five pairs of disembodied legs. Filmed in high-contrast black and white photography, the film dismembers the female body. It features upper bodies that are dark and blended into the shadowy background, whereas their legs are light and become the dominant image on screen. Seventy-five years later, Jean Kilbourne in her famous video-lecture, *Still Killing Us Softly*, opines that female body fragmentation in visual media has led to the objectification and dehumanization of females. Jane Caputi's *Gossips, Gorgons, and Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (1993) asserts that "such images intend the internal fissioning, dissociation, and self-mutilation of women" (94). *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* fragmented dancers set a standard for the objectification of women in science fiction film.

The antifeminist theme of Melies's film continues with the image of the rocket landing in the eye of a *man* in the moon. Although historically, the moon has been a female symbol because it corresponds with the length of menstrual cycles, the symbolic meaning began to change in the fourteenth century. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, linguistic history of the phrase *man in the moon* started in 1310, a year that coincided with European witch-burnings, a quintessential misogynist practice (see chapter X). The dictionary also records that in 1562, J. Heywood's *Proverbs and Epigraphs* contains the phrase "Wee say (not the woman) the man in the moone," which refers to the feminine symbolism that predates the notion of the man in the moon. This linguistic shift can also be read as a denial of female power that was indicative of the late Victorian Era, a period famous for its simultaneous deification and vilification of women. A change in the use of language is sociologically significant, according to Terrence W. Deacon's *The Symbolic Species*:

It is as though the symbolic power of words is only on loan to its users. It is as if symbols ultimately derive their representational power, not from the individual, but from a particular society at a particular time. (452)

According to Barbara Walker, "many common religious symbols were stolen from ancient woman-centered systems and reinterpreted in the contexts of patriarchy" (xi). Along these lines, the images of Melies' disembodied female legs combined with the rocket landing in the eye of the man in the moon can be seen as the first instance of symbolic marginalization of women in early science fiction film.

Melies' reference to the man in the moon is also indicative of the antifeminist leanings of the late Victorian culture, which gave us Dracula, women's suffrage, and temperance movements. In Melies' fourteen-minute film, the fact that women are helpmates to the male scientist-astronauts, that their bodies are fragmented, and that the moon is male, together tell the audience how the idealized perfect woman in 1902 should look and behave. The scantiness of their costumes together with their seductive handling of the phallic rocket imply that women must be sexy while their exclusion from the trip into space indicates that they need to know their place as the stay-at-home helpmates of men.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIRTH OF WORLDWIDE WARFARE: 1918-1940

"It's no life being a steer"

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

After the first World War caused pain, suffering, and death for countless men and women, *vagina dentata* images appeared again as a response to post-war trauma. After the war, German Freikorps soldiers chronicled accounts of dismemberment and death at the hands of Bolshevik women and Allied soldiers reported "uncivilized warfare" that required living in the trenches with their own dead (Theweleit 63-70). Survivors whom Gertrude Stein called the "lost generation" attempted to make sense of the destruction. Unfortunately, psychological acceptance again involved scapegoating women in art, literature, and film.

Ernest Hemingway wrote of the castrated veteran Jake Barnes and his phallic female companion, Brett Ashley. Existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre—whose formative years were spent in World War I France—later penned that nothing made sense because "God is dead." The Surrealists represented this anxiety and uncertainty in *vagina dentata* imagery. The image in Max Ernst's 1937 painting of a shrieking, bird-like monster (fig. 34) seems unrelated to the *vagina dentata* without its title, *The Angel of Hearth and Home*. Salvadore Dalí was more overt about his imagery when he created a statue of a nude woman with a lobster on her crotch and called it the *Vagina Dentata* (fig 35).

An explanation for the negative projection and subsequent appearance of this image might be explained by the early twentieth-century's women's movement, which included suffragettes, other female political activists, and proponents of birth control led by Margaret Sanger. These women's desire for equality was quite threatening to men, as evidenced in the years of struggle necessary to accomplish



Figure 34. Max Ernst's *The Angel of Hearth and Home*



Figure 35. Salvadore Dali's *Vagina Dentata*. Reproduced courtesy of Artists Rights Society, New York.

their meager goals—women's right to vote and control of their own reproduction abilities.

An article written for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (April 29, 1931), reported that in the past two decades the number of women in the German workforce increased almost five percent, which meant that over eleven and one half million women worked outside the home (Kaes 212). During this time, women gained varying degrees of power in all industries, not excluding film. Using a screenplay based on a novel written by his wife, Thea von Harbou, Fritz Lang directed the first major science fiction film. *Metropolis* (1925), produced in the salad days of the Weimar Republic, pays homage to Medieval Christian art in the vaginal imagery of the film's hellish underground factory. Lang's original set design, special effects, and futuristic tale have made this an innovative and influential film from the time of its release to the present day. *Sight and Sound* film journal considers *Metropolis* one of the top ten best films released in 1925, and it was recently re-released in a restored but shorter (87 min.) version 1984, featuring a soundtrack produced by Giorgio Moroder. This version is also color tinted, supposedly according to Fritz Lang's original vision (on-line Internet Movie Database).

Metropolis opens with a montage of mechanical images of pistons, engines, and steam moving up and down, in and out in a rhythm that mimics the sexual act as mechanical, steady, unfeeling, and dispassionate—a metaphor for capitalist society in the industrial age. The montage cuts to an obviously wealthy, pampered young man dressed in knickers playing tag with a woman in what is called a pleasure dome. She is dressed as a flapper, the epitome of the independent woman of the 1920s.

Their game is interrupted when Freder gazes upon a beautiful Madonna figure surrounded by a dozen or so miserable workers' children framed by a threshold that leads to the unknown. Freder immediately falls in love. Captivated

by the ethereal beauty of the consummate virginal mother figure, Freder abandons the flapper to follow the Madonna into the subterranean factory.

He travels down long, narrow, vaginal passageways where he sees zombie-like workers and the dangerous machinery that enslaves them. He recognizes that the inhumane conditions under which working-class slaves exhaust themselves exist so that the above-ground, upper-classes can live a fantasy existence in which they have no problems or responsibilities.

Freder ascends to his father's office after he witnesses a horrific fatal accident involving an employee. He reports the tragedy to his father, who tells Freder that "such accidents are unavoidable." Dissatisfied with his father's response, Freder descends again, empathizes with an exhausted worker, and offers to take over his job. The worker explains to Freder that the clockwork must be constantly supervised or else the factory will blow up due to a build-up of steam in the furnace.

After he and the factory worker trade clothes, Freder spends his day constantly moving the hands of the clock around the dial while the worker spends his day in above-ground bars. As Freder gazes fearfully into the furnace (fig. 36), he fantasizes that the fiery opening dissolves into an image of the evil Molech (fig. 37), a Tyrian fire god who, according to Barbara Walker, was worshipped by the Jews in the time of Solomon. She claims that Christians adopted this word out of the Bible as a synonym for hell, and also gave Molech a prominent position among the demons (667). Molech's appearance is that of the *vagina dentata*, an orifice into which workers shovel charcoal to produce steam so that the mechanical factory can operate, a castration image that symbolizes how the workers have experienced amputations of their souls.

The vaginal imagery continues as Freder follows other workers down labyrinthine hallways and witnesses the Madonna powerfully preaching the biblical

tale of the Tower of Babel as a positive allegory for what the workers need—a mediator between themselves and the power elite. Maria fills the role of the good mother and gains the admiration of both Freder and the workers by preaching that prayer and patience will produce a savior who will moderate between the "head and the hands" and become "the heart" that is needed to save the workers.

Meanwhile, John Frederson and the evil Rotwang, a demented scientist, conspire to built a perfect worker—a feminine robot or female Frankenstein's monster that can do everything the workers do, only better, because she has no personal needs. But as the two learn about the rebellious workers, John tells Rotwang—whose deformed, rubber-gloved hand is a metaphor for his own castrated, loveless existence—to make the robot in Maria's image. He wants her to "sow discord" among the revolutionary workers who have now been rendered obsolete by Rotwang's new invention.

Rotwang kidnaps the good Maria so that he can duplicate her image and then replace her with an evil duplicate. Amazingly, the workers have no trouble believing the "false" Maria, even though her mannerisms and messages are quite different, a response which indicates that they accept the stereotype that women are fickle, changeable creatures whose moods alter with the cycles of the moon. The "good" Maria preaches peaceful protests while the "false" Maria incites violence and tells the workers that they must fight vehemently for their rights. She encourages them to stop minding the factory, to let it explode and flood so that the upper classes will suffer. However, in their Dionysian frenzy, the men and women of the underclass forget that their homes, children, and possibly their own lives will also be sacrificed along with the factory.

Once the workers understand that Maria's advice can no longer be trusted, they burn her at the stake in a scene that pays homage to medieval witch burnings.



Figure 36. Furnace from *Metropolis* (1926). Dir. Fritz Lang. Reproduced courtesy of Nostalgia Family Video.

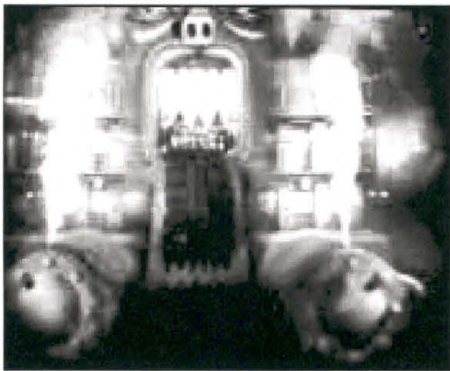


Figure 37. Molech from *Metropolis*

At this point, Freder fears that they are burning the "good" Maria and he protests in vain. Telotte describes the public execution as an act of regression:

. . . [T]hat ancient manner of exorcism—a cultural regression or recoil from this futuristic world and its promises—reveals the disparity between the seductive surface and underlying reality, as the people watch horrified while the robot's false human veneer burns away, exposing the gleaming mechanism and mocking mechanical countenance underneath. It is an effective image—of a technological power mocking the human for being so easily seduced by its attractive packaging, its seemingly human features (67).

In the end, Freder finds the good Maria and together they save all the children, salvage the factory, and unite the upper and lower classes. John Frederson learns to use his "heart" when he thinks that his son's life was lost in the flood.

Throughout the film, the good Maria is surrounded with maternal images of the *vagina fecunda*: children, vaginal passageways, and wombic chapels from which she preaches her message of nonviolent revolution. The "false" Maria is associated with the *vagina dentata*—fiery Moloch and the flooding water—both elements of mass destruction. Her smoldering sexuality seduces the workers, although the audience immediately understands that the "false" Maria's risqué dance scene is a chief indicator of evil intent. In this sequence, she becomes an image of Mata Hari, who was executed before a firing squad for selling information to the Germans during World War I. Although modern historians believe that the only thing Mata Hari actually sold to the Germans was her body, the image would be well known to audiences of the 20s and 30s.

After the Great World War, Germany's Weimer Republic became a nexus of advanced technology, philosophy, and social equality. During this time, women gained considerable power after they proved themselves in the workforce during

the war. In this milieu, women gained the right to vote in 1918, two years before women's suffrage was granted in the United States. A decade later, Germany witnessed a backlash toward feminists, that was probably based at least in part on Sigmund Freud's misogynous works.

This period witnessed Hitler's criminalization of abortion rights because of the depletion of European populations caused by the war. Hitler believed that repopulating Germany with Aryan brethren was of utmost importance, although he had no qualms about reducing the populace of Jews and gypsies.

Hitler reported on a number of occasions that he loved *Metropolis*. There is even a remote possibility that the film helped to influence his systematic reduction of the rights of women, Jews, gypsies, and any other group that he considered inferior, an action which led to the holocaust and, eventually, the Second World War, which also spawned the atomic bomb (see chapter IX).

After the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929, Western society suffered the Great Depression. Afterwards, the 1930s produced science-fiction disaster films that reflected fear and anxiety for the future of civilization in an economically-depressed, post-industrial-age world.

Science fiction cinema of the 1930s also looked to the past to find images of a future. In 1932, Erle Kenton's *Island of Lost Souls*, based on H.G. Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) drew on the economically depressed milieu under which it was filmed. Within the text and the film, the character of the Panther Woman pays homage to the birth of ancient Rome and the tale of Remus and Romulus, who were suckled by the she-wolf (see Chapter IV).

Even before *Island of Lost Souls* was produced, audiences were already fascinated with the image of Iota, the Panther Woman—who was an invention of Kenton's, and not of Wells. In 1931, when Kenton began production, he organized

a nationwide contest to choose an unknown to play the part of the Panther Woman in a film adaptation of Wells' novel.

The reason that such a large number of women auditioned for the part is complicated. Obviously, the United States was suffering through the Great Depression that left many people destitute. Young women needed money to support themselves and their families. This situation was dramatized in Merian C. Cooper's *King Kong*, when Fay Wray's Ann Darrow accepts a movie role out of economic desperation coupled with desire for fame and travel. However, there may have been other unconscious motivations for women to desire the role of the Panther Woman—a woman who overpowers and devours her mate, as an animal would. However, the reality of the role is that she is completely powerless, a captive slave of the island and made a powerful statement about slave owners, Nazis, and other powerful groups that have denigrated humanity.

During the 1920s and 30s, the desire audiences had for highly-sexualized women was reinforced to sell-out audiences for the *Josephine Baker Nigress Revue* in Paris that recalled the so-called "Hottentot Venus," a southern African woman named Saartjie Baartman. A nineteenth century French physician, Georges Cuvier traveled around Europe displaying Baartman as a freak because of her large buttocks, while insinuating that she had teeth in her vagina. He claimed that Black women had greater libido than did Anglo women; they were more like animals, therefore more sexual. Although Baker's nude dancing was banned in the United States, Marlene Dietrich aped her style with a blonde Afro, congo drums, and a sensual dance in *Blonde Venus*, released in 1932. Therefore, when *Island of Lost Souls* was released in the same year, the image of the (black) Panther Woman was undeniably racist. She is just one *lota* of an animal—perhaps with teeth in her vagina, also.

The Panther Woman became a metaphor for powerful, seductive Greta Garbo or Josephine Baker, the sexual woman that arose in film in the 1920s. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* both depict women with strong libidos, feminine desires which had been conspicuously absent from heroines in earlier American literature. The sexuality of the *femme-fatales* in these novels becomes the ruination of the protagonists. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan kills her husband's mistress in a hit-and-run accident after she witnesses a quarrel between him, Tom Buchanan, and Jay Gatsby, her lover. During the argument, she capriciously defends both men. After the accident, she allows Gatsby to take the blame for the accident and suffers no remorse when he is murdered by the mistress's husband. In Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Lady Brett's unbridled sexuality serves to magnify the tragedy of Jake Barnes' impotence. The *Island of Lost Souls* establishes the sexual woman as part animal, part human.

Once the film's protagonist, Edward Parker, arrives on the mysterious island, the images he sees are remarkably feminine. First he explores a dark, wet, wombic cave that informs the viewer that there is a strange kind of birth taking place on this island. It becomes obvious that humans are mated with animals with a variety of monstrous results. Although there are myriad man and beast mixtures, by far the most sympathetic character is that of Iota, the Panther Woman. Because of the Panther Woman contest that took place the year before, the audience entered the theatre with the foreknowledge that the film contained a Panther Woman. Many members of the audience doubtlessly came to the cinema in hope of seeing unbridled sexuality.

In her first scene, Iota's dress calls attention to her sexuality. The shift has a large flower printed on the front so that the stamen points to her vagina. The flower image is used again when Dr. Moreau explains how he sped up evolution. Flower

symbolism had already been a topic of discussion in 1920s artistic circles because of Georgia O'Keeffe's artistic style during that time. Although she vehemently denied that her flowers represent a woman's pudenda (Robinson 177), her flowers are undeniably feminine and many of her paintings and imagery appear to be the image of the *vagina fecunda* (fig. 38). The fact that her art was appreciated and discussed indicates that women were achieving a modicum of power. O'Keeffe's works started a trend to glorify female genitals that has influenced present-day female artists such as Judy Chicago. Doubtless, she showed her feminist or maybe just egoist attitudes when she declared that she was not just one of the best female artists, but one of the very best artists of her day.

Male fear of feminine sexual power was symbolized later in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* when Iota unsuccessfully attempts to seduce Parker, and the audience exposed to close-up shots of her cat-like fingernails as they claw his back. The audience wonders what would have happened to Parker if he had allowed himself to be seduced. Would he have been killed or castrated? Where else does she have teeth?

Iota expresses intense fear with regard to a hut she calls the "House of Pain," where she and other victims of Dr. Moreau's experiments are held captive. The audience can only hear the tortured screams of the creatures that are half-human and half-animal behind the closed doors of the "House of Pain." Afterward, Dr. Moreau announces that Iota is "tender like a woman." Had the teeth in her vagina been pulled? Is that the painful "treatment" that she received in the "House of Pain?"

In 1934, William Cameron Menzies directed an adaptation of another H.G. Wells novel, *The Shape of Things to Come* (1896) called *Things to Come*, in which he borrows heavily from history to create visions of the future. The film contains images from the Dark Ages to represent a barbaric, post-apocalyptic future while

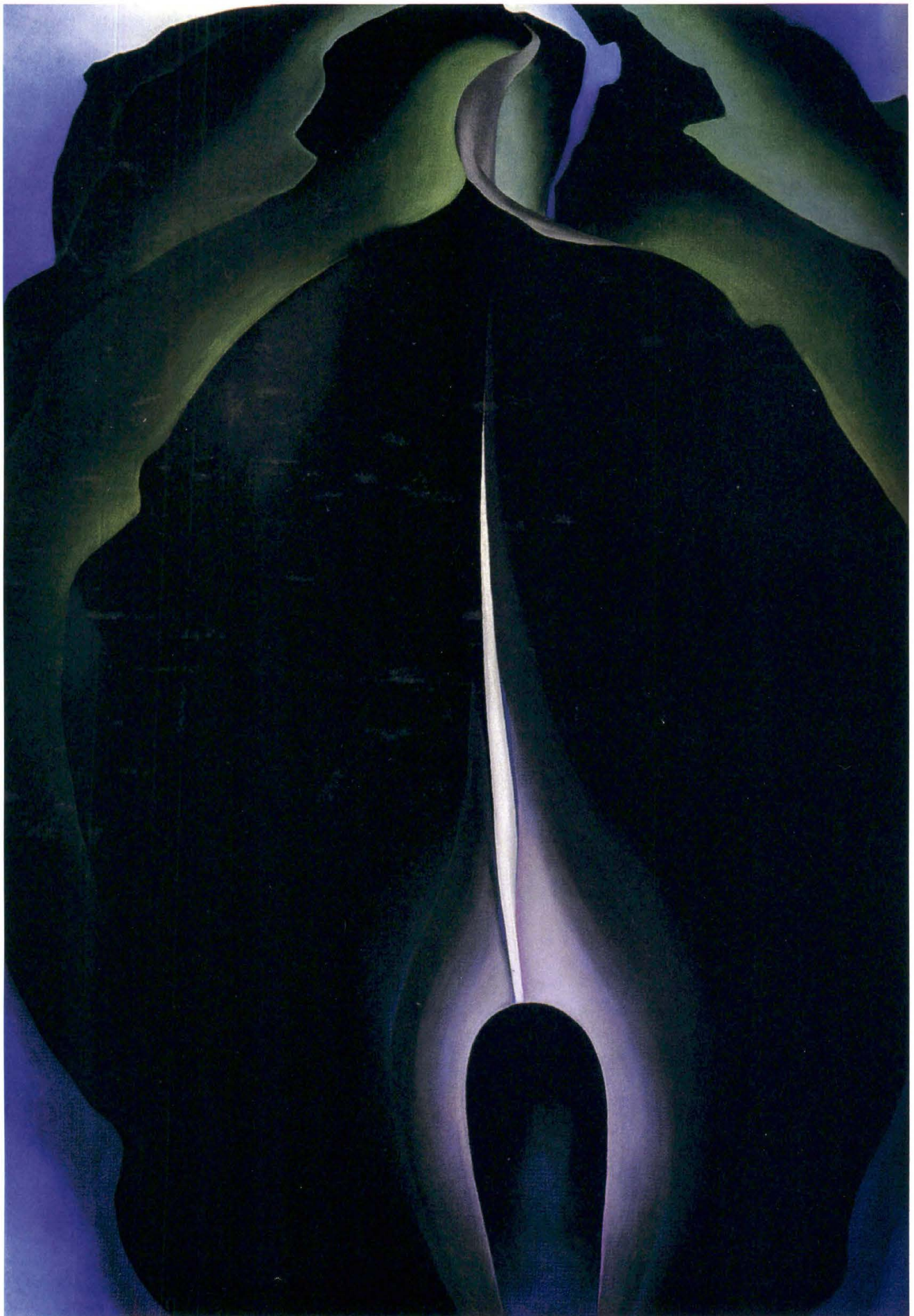


Figure 38. Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit IV*

Greco-Roman attire, architecture, and philosophy reflect a desire to return to the cradle of civilization to find a utopian future.

These images reinforce the film's antiwar, pro-science theme, while criticizing a war-mongering phallic patriarchal culture. The film opens with preschool age boys at Christmas time in 1933 playing with war toys, which their mother explains "teaches them to use their hands." Just then they hear the first bomb of a fictional World War II. (*Things to Come* was released two years before the actual declaration of World War II, during which time the Italians and Germans were causing political unrest throughout Europe.)

The film cuts to a devastating war montage, which utilizes a calendar's quickly-turning pages as transitions. Every decade or so the calendar stops to illustrate the absurdity of war. For example, at one point a plane crash lands, causing injury to the pilot. Another pilot lands to provide help to the injured pilot lying in the haze of mustard gas. After a little enemy girl enters the scene, the injured pilot gives her the only operable gas mask. He laughs at the absurdity of gassing an entire town, then saving one girl's life.

Within the narrative, the Wandering Sickness of 1964 causes its victims to stagger in a comatose state while they become targets for snipers, who kill them because they cannot be cured. A young man and woman are killed by snipers. The husband of the young woman objects loudly when the snipers put her in their crosshairs; however, their protests are in vain. She and other victims of the Wandering Sickness continue to be euthanized with rifles until the epidemic passes.

The war finally ends in 1970, thirty-seven years after it began. At this time phallic weapons of mass destruction have wiped out civilization as we know it. Everytown in 1970 resembles a European village during the Dark Ages. These people express longing for their past technological achievements. They have no

automobiles or airplanes. People stand around a broken-down car and reminisce about how they could have once driven one hundred miles in one day.

In a short take, the audience views a number of people going underground into the wombic haven of Mother Earth's cave, through a vaginal earthen tunnel. In Menzies's vision of the year 1970, people of Everytown become barbarians having much in common with Europe in the Dark Ages when Black Plague pandemics wiped out whole communities. However, Everytown 1970 has a "chief" of the people who remains above ground. He is a barbaric, animal-skin clad macho-man who represents the baser side of masculine nature. Although proud to be married to the chief, Rowena (Margaretta Scott) embodies what is left of civilization. Strong, dark, and deep-voiced, she questions her husband's hostility.

After a stranger from Wings Over the World lands in an airplane, she tells him that she would like to see life outside of Everytown. She longs for the beauty and grace of by-gone eras. The stranger explains that Wings over the World is a group of civilized people living a modern, peaceful existence. They are apparently the people who went underground during the plague of the Wandering Death. The underground womb saved them from barbarism after they were reborn through Mother Earth's *vagina fecunda*. Now they have defeated the barbarians of Everytown by shooting them with tranquilizer darts. When they awake, they find their chief dead (the only casualty) and they load a plane through another vaginal passageway, a process that results in the restoration of civilization.

In this high-tech utopian city, the argument is between the progress-seekers and the anti-science people. Some feel that it was science that destroyed civilization, instead of understanding that it was humanity's barbaric nature that led to its destruction.

Within the film female characters and *vagina fecunda* imagery express hope for the future, while males and phallic imagery represent barbarism, death, and

destruction. The film was produced during the Great Depression, which was a period when women had to be strong in order to pull their families through tough economic times. During the Depression, many women and children went to work along side men in order to provide their families with food, clothing, and shelter. Therefore, it was advantageous for families to have strong mothers, sisters, and daughters. While World War I veterans suffered from what British physician C.S. Myers called "shell shock" (Winter 212), women held down jobs. Wives and mothers had to be strong for the entire family, which set an example for their daughters of an independent woman. Therefore, the fantasy women in this science fiction film are wise and strong. Also, the film represents Great Britain's anxieties about losing her standing as a world power. The notion that Britain was falling like the Roman Empire had probably led the filmmakers to view the Greco-Roman era in a positive light. After the First World War, many feared that the next war would end the world as they knew it, which could cause another Dark Ages.

After the rise of Hitler's Germany, which led to the onset of World War II, science fiction film took a backseat in the United States to Frank Capra's ultra-sentimental classics such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941), which promoted hometown values and anti-capitalist themes. His work allowed audiences to feel nostalgia for the good old days while giving them hope for the future. The popularity of these films no doubt stemmed from audience desire to enter a movie house and forget their troubles. Many film-goers were women whose boyfriends and husbands were away from home preparing for war or serving their country. During this time, science fiction was becoming science fact as Manhattan Project scientists employed Albert Einstein's theories to build an ultimate weapon of mass destruction.

CHAPTER X

THE BIRTH OF THE BOMB: 1940-1962

"Mr. President, I have blood on my hands."

—Robert J. Oppenheimer to Harry Truman

"All [Oppenheimer] did was make the bomb, I'm the guy who fired it off."

—President Harry S. Truman

As the Manhattan Project led by J. Robert Oppenheimer struggled to produce the first atomic bomb, scientists took bets on whether they would produce a dud or success—in their lingo, a "girl" or a "boy." After they began to develop the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II, the project's language began to include metaphors for male birth: Bombs named *Fat Man* and *Little Boy*. After the war, the National Baby Association continued this metaphoric trend when they named J. Robert Oppenheimer "Father of the Year." Physicist and historian Brian Easlea points out that the bomb's initial success resulted in its masculinization when Oppenheimer was successful in creating viable atomic weapons that annihilated millions of Japanese people (Caputi 106).

After *Fat Man* and *Little Boy* succeeded in ending the war, the media began to utilize a phallic male symbolism for success in the iconographic image of the mushroom cloud (fig. 39). However, the bomb was already becoming somewhat feminized when the B-29 carrying the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima had the name of the pilot's mother—*Enola Gay*—painted on the fuselage. The destructive feminine element was utilized throughout the war when the fighter jets that were the agents of death to the enemy were painted with toothy mouths (fig. 40), images of the *vagina dentata* that stemmed from the fighter pilots' desire to instill fear in their enemies.

In 1946, a year after *Enola Gay* dropped *Fat Man* on Hiroshima, Americans learned that their government was testing nuclear weapons on U.S. soil in New

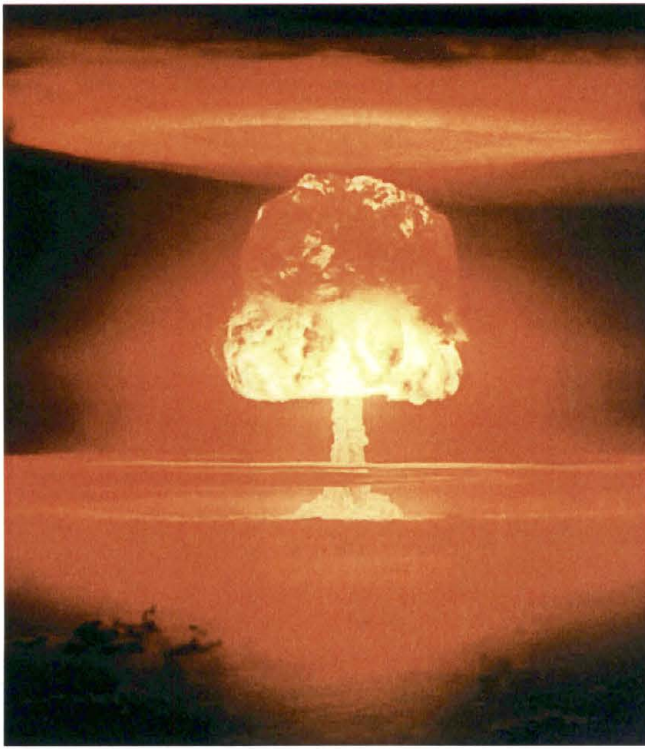


Figure 39. Atomic Mushroom Cloud

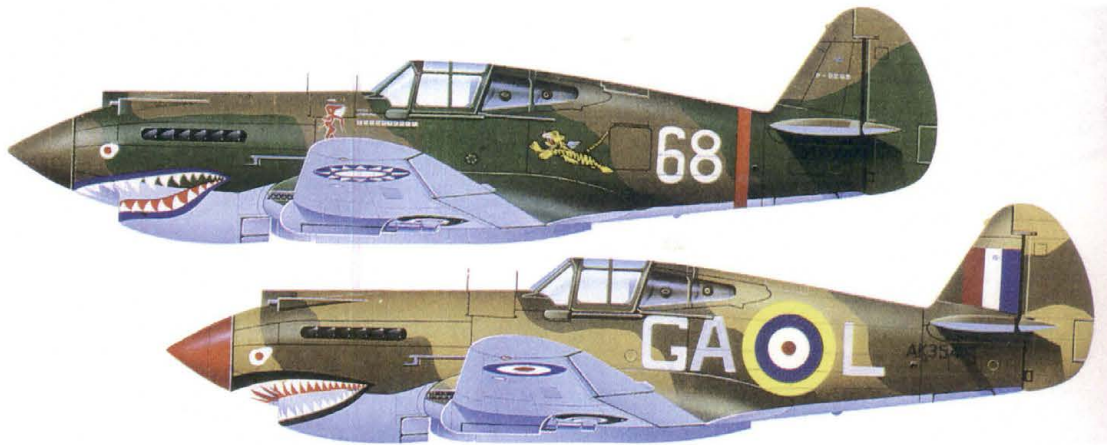


Figure 40. World War II Fighter Planes

Mexico, Nevada, and the Bikini Islands. This testing triggered the projection of the atomic bomb's destructive force onto the feminine persona. The feminization of the bomb continued as people became frightened of not only its initial power, but also of its subsequent radiation fallout. As a result, people became afraid for their own progeny and the future of the world. In 1947, many people in New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada began to "witness" flying saucers by the thousands, probably projections of the anxiety people felt regarding the prospect of living in a world that contained nuclear power, communists, and other spawns of male birth including concern about potential mutations in the evolution of plants and animals that would affect future generations. Historian Michael Woods describes how the bomb became feminized in 1946 as part of the projection of male guilt for spawning such a destructive child:

The bomb dropped on Bikini was called Gilda and had a picture of Rita Hayworth [the full-figured epitome of the modern fertility goddess] painted on it. The phallic agent of destruction underwent a sex change, and the delight and terror of our new power were channeled into an old and familiar story: our fear and love of women. We got rid of guilt too: If women are always to blame, starting with Eve perhaps, or Mother Nature, then men can't be to blame" (51).

Public high schools brought Darwin's theory of evolution and dinosaur extinction home to many Americans. This knowledge helped fuel fears that atomic energy would bring about the next evolutionary step that might not include humanity. Jane Caputi argues that, in America's collective unconscious, an angry Mother Nature would punish humanity because mankind polluted her once fertile soils with radiation that rendered the ground so poisoned that natural birth could not take place (46).

Further projection onto the feminine occurred in 1946, four days after the first U.S. bomb test in Bikini, when the two-piece swimsuits that were the rage on beaches throughout Europe and later in the United States were dubbed *bikinis*, terminology which continues to this day as a reminder that women's sexual power was once linked to atomic warfare. The connection between war and sex that led to the feminization of the bomb can also be found in wartime newsreels that feature footage of soldiers and their wives and girlfriends publicly and passionately kissing and crying at depots and seaports. The newsreels were shown before featured movies in hometown cinemas and were therefore seen by large audiences, many of whom came to see a science fiction film. As a consequence, the two images coalesced in many people's minds. Unfortunately for some soldiers, the Bouncing Betty landmine the Germans introduced in World War II, according to *The Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, "was activated by a trip wire that caused the mine to fly some 30 to 60 centimeters. (about 12 to 24 inches) into the air before exploding" (Weinfeld 345). This meant, of course, that the landmine castrated its victim, which undoubtedly created a negative association in the minds of soldiers between sex and castration, which found its way into the science fiction films of the 1950s.

In 1951, the popularity of Howard Hawks's *The Thing* metaphorically chronicled our fear of "the other" inherent in the "Red Scare" that began in 1947 when the House Un-American Activities Committee—who considered it their duty to purge the country of any Communist influences—questioned a variety of film and literary figures such as Gary Cooper, Ronald Reagan, and Bertolt Brecht. The HUAC determined that one director, Edward Dmytryk, and nine screenwriters—the so-called "Hollywood Ten" were blacklisted because they were suspected of incorporating subversive, communist messages in their films. From 1951 to 1954, HUAC, directed by John S. Wood, compiled a list of 324 present and former Hollywood workers who were supposedly were or had been members of the

Communist party. Not only did 211 Hollywood workers lose their jobs, but the content of movies also began to shift. The film industry shied away from films about social problems unless they were blatantly anti-communist (Mining Co. on-line). During this time, science fiction filmmakers began to use monstrous birth imagery to symbolize communists who were considered evil so that we could justify killing them with atomic bombs if they threatened our freedom.

In *The Thing*, "the communist other" is a vegetable from another planet who has evolved into a humanoid through monstrous asexual reproduction. The film's frozen, sterile, arctic setting represents American fear that Russia would drop the bomb on the United States and then take over the free world. Communists were considered "cold" and devoid of emotion or ambition. *The Thing's* arctic setting drives home the point that Russia and the communists are closer than we think—right across that ice.

In the film, after Captain Patrick Hendry (Kenneth Tobey) flies a group of scientists stationed at an Arctic base to the spot where an unidentified aircraft has crashed, they find that it has melted into the ice and then frozen over. They notice that the aircraft is circular (cunic?) in shape. In a reckless maneuver, Hendry accidentally explodes the aircraft, but finds its monstrous pilot frozen in the ice. When a nervous soldier unknowingly throws an electric blanket over the pilot, the creature thaws, bursts from the ice, and attacks. Impervious to hypothermia, the male alien's severed hand begins to multiply in the same way ivy cuttings will grow new vines. This device combines birth and castration images that bring to mind Greek mythology's tale of Chronos, whose daughter, Aphrodite, grows out of the sea into which his severed genitals were thrown.

Both stories depict an evil father. Chronos's son, Zeus, castrates his father because Chronos abused his wife, Zeus's mother (see chapter III). In *The Thing*, the "mad" scientist with a Russian accent represents an evil father of sorts. He

leads an exploration team consisting of his secretary and several other scientists, soldiers, and a reporter sent to investigate a mysterious aircraft in the arctic. Miss Nicholson, the secretary, at first defends her boss when she tells the soldiers that the scientist's brilliance is misunderstood. However, Nicholson abandons the scientist after he claims that "knowledge is more important than life." Nicholson obviously represents the working woman of the late 1940s and early 1950s who remained in the work force after the war was over. During the war, many women took jobs that were normally performed by men who were serving their country. After the war, these women were encouraged to leave their jobs to re-establish home for their returning husbands and sons. During this time, women in the work force served as a reminder of the years at war and how it ended with a big bang. Miss Nicholson's actions in the film fulfill the male desire to return the work force to an all-male network devoid of women: She quits her job and plans to marry Hendry, the soldiers' lecherous commanding officer. In fact, Carpenter's 1982 remake of *The Thing* includes no women (per the original short story).

Nicholson rejects her scientist boss not only because she agrees to remove herself from the work force, marry, and procreate, but also because she is the "perfect" Hawksian woman—gutsy, strong, witty, and sexually mature—therefore allowed to judge right from wrong, good from bad. She thwarts the misdirected scientist's plans to protect the monstrous creature—who is capable of giving birth without a woman—when she offers a stereotypically female plan to kill the creature. She suggests various ways to cook the creature: "boil, fry, broil, or bake it." Nicholson is right. She kills the symbol for the atomic age—male birth, which represents communism—through her own feminine tools.

The film's name carries symbolic weight with historical heft. As far back as 1386, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* uses the word *thing* to euphemistically describe the male member. (*Wife's Prol.* 121). Therefore, the title and the film are metaphors for

male reproduction and birth, the monstrous force that might destroy the planet, or at least make the environment uninhabitable for humans.

Another successful science fiction film of the 1950s, Gordon Douglas's *Them!* (1954), focuses on environmental damage caused by exposure to nuclear radiation. The film's visual imagery chronicles the sex change occurring in the metaphors for atomic power. *Them!* begins near Alamogordo, New Mexico, site of the early atomic bomb tests. The premise is that nuclear fallout causes ordinary desert ants to mutate generation by generation. They become eight feet long and as proportionally powerful as their commonplace counterparts. They attack and kills humans as they forage for sugar so that they can live and reproduce.

The FBI sends in scientific experts: an eccentric scientist, Dr. Harold Medford, and his attractive daughter. The viewer first sees her as simply a pair of disembodied shapely legs that fill the frame as she attempts to pull her skirt from the plane door in which it is caught. She is reduced to a fragmented sexual signifier before she is introduced. Although she holds a doctorate and introduces herself as Dr. Medford, she tells the men that if calling her "doctor," the symbol of her intellectual superiority, makes them uncomfortable, they can call her *Pat*, an androgynous first name which will probably make her seem even more threatening. She is beautiful, but not showy. Her flat shoes and drab uniform are practical and reveal little more than shapely legs. She does show grit when she descends into a tunnel to investigate the original hive so that her father will not have to risk his health. She only has eyes for her father, perhaps as a subtle allusion to Electra, although several of the men show an interest in her.

The critical theory that the ants are a metaphor for communism has been thoroughly fleshed-out by a number of critics (Warren 193, Peary 157). However, few critics discuss how these creature also represent fear for our progeny. Will our children and grandchildren mutate and become deformed? Will our children be

more evil than ourselves? These fears are expressed in *Them!* in the birth imagery of the wet, vaginal, underground hives in the Los Angeles storm drains that the queen ants build using their own sticky saliva. When the men arrive at the hive, they note that it must be the hive because it has a "brood smell," undoubtedly referring to the scent of a woman. The hive, the last two queens, and their progeny are burned to death, a visual metaphor that represents the destruction of the planet in a nuclear holocaust.

The extinction theme continues in Fred Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956). In the film, astronauts travel to Altair, a distant planet that was the site of a spaceship wreck eighteen years before. When they communicate with an inhabitant, they are told not to land because their safety cannot be guaranteed. They land anyway and learn that not only have the original inhabitants—the Krell—become extinct, but everyone on the shipwrecked spacecraft is also dead except for a scientist and his daughter, Altaira.

They learn that the Krell's powerful technology caused the extinction of the original inhabitants when it produced a Freudian Id monster. This personification of the scientist's unconscious expresses purely selfish desires. The film becomes an allegory for the fear that the evil fathers of the Space Age may destroy our planet.

By the time *Forbidden Planet* was released, the United States was already into a space race with the Soviet Union. Many people believed in UFOs. Advanced races of people would use advanced forms of atomic power. Some scientists hypothesized that there was intelligent life in outer space and "Area 51" was entering contemporary mythology. In response to fears about such matters, scientists were concentrating on making atomic energy's image more positive. They pointed out that we could use it for space travel, which was appealing because men could become heroes without going to war.

The overall consumer attitude of the 1950s and optimism about the future of space travel and automated convenience items such as washing machines, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners encouraged belief that we were on the brink of a new renaissance. However, atomic bomb anxiety was projected onto UFOs and aliens and eventually the omnipresent other, women. In the early 1950s, Marilyn Monroe and her lookalikes became "sex-bombs;" Miss A-Bomb contests were held in Nevada and Arizona—areas commonly known for bomb-testing and fallout; and, as mentioned, the two-piece swimsuit was named for a tiny island that was also used for testing.

Forbidden Planet's Altaira presents the sex-bomb in an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in which the Altaira/Miranda figure is an idealized, perfect woman. Having never seen another man besides her father, Altaira is a virgin who likes men and adores petting. Apparently her father has educated her in the sciences; however, she never offers any evidence that she has a working knowledge of anything but sex.

In a scene early in the film, Altaira's potential suitor, one of the crew members, kills her pet lion in an act reminiscent of the Native American legends involving the hero breaking out the vaginal teeth in order to bring society to a region. According to Lederer, "the first women of the Chaco Indians were said to have had teeth in their vagina with which they ate; obviously, men could not approach them until the culture hero, Caroucho, broke the teeth out" (44). Lederer also points out that the hero in the New Mexico Jicarilla Apaches' myth cured women of toothed vaginas by giving them berry medicine (45). In Indian myth, he says, after a man removed his wife's vaginal teeth, she was unable to enjoy sex because her vagina was too large. After many men unsuccessfully tried to please her, she was killed when she attempted to copulate with a horse (Lederer 46).

The act of killing Altaira's dangerous, toothy pet symbolically represents breaking the virgin's hymen, which causes bleeding, therefore activating a castration complex, as explained by Sigmund Freud:

It is obviously connected with the prohibition against murder and forms a protective measure against the primal thirst for blood, primæval man's pleasure in killing. According to this view the taboo of virginity is connected with the taboo of menstruation which is almost universally maintained. Primitive people cannot dissociate the puzzling phenomenon of this monthly flow of blood from sadistic ideas. Menstruation, especially its first appearance, is interpreted as the bite of some spirit-animal, perhaps as a sign of sexual intercourse with this ancestral spirit (Strachey 6: 197).

The Id monster—named after the Freudian concept—only wants to kill Altaira when she links herself sexually to a man who is not her father. This is because the Id monster is the personification of her father's id, seeking to gratify himself at the expense of others. The sociopathic creature only wants a virginal daughter to live chastely with him. After she is sexualized, she becomes the mysterious Other, whom he cannot understand. Only after the father dies can Altaira continue an adult life with her new husband. However, she is noticeably unaffected by her father's death, even though he has been her only consort for her entire life. Her lack of grief indicates that the love of a good man should solve all of a woman's problems.

Although the female presence in '50s science fiction is minimal, what little we see is significant. The desire for a "nuclear" family arose out of '50s propaganda that told us that the future meant a return to the past with regard to gender issues. Asexual women were to be worshipped and respected, while sensual women were not to be trusted. This dichotomy was typical of female characters and imagery in science fiction films. Women with tainted pasts tended

to be associated with the fear of communism, while sexually pure women were associated with American democracy.

Feminization of the fear of communism and conformity were pervading themes of Don Siegal's 1956 *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In the film's opening scenes, the first people to notice that others were losing their personalities—becoming "pods" were women and children, whom the town's male power elite did not believe. Grace Metalious's *Peyton Place*, published in the same year, similarly describes cases of child abuse in which the victims' accusations were ignored. In the sexually repressed milieu of the 1950s, rape and incest frequently went unreported, while fertility was often a curse for a woman who did not possess adequate birth control methods.

In the film, Miles, a divorced doctor, begins to investigate reports that "my sister isn't my sister and my father isn't my father" from members of the community, while the town psychiatrist disregards the widespread panic as mass hysteria because of the "troubles in the world." These "troubles" undoubtedly refer to the omnipresent threat of nuclear annihilation.

Enter Dana Wynter as Becky, his divorced ex-girlfriend, wearing a strapless dress that accentuates her breasts with layers of ruffles in an epitome of the sex bomb darling of the 1950s. Together they learn that after the townspeople go to sleep, they are reborn devoid of emotion. They emerge from vaginal pods from space (fig. 41), in one interpretation this is a projection of the fear of communist invasion onto the feminine Other. During this time, communists were portrayed in propaganda as conformists, having no ambition or spirit.

In another (rather contradictory) reading, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is an anti-McCarthy indictment of the Red-scare American mentality. Danny Peary explains this interpretation:



Figure 41. Pods from *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

Those who argue that *Body Snatcher* is an anti-McCarthy polemic begin with the premise that Siegel establishes that the fascistic pod people *already* comprise the American majority, control the government, law enforcement agencies, and communications, and dictate the country's political line. In other words, Joseph R. McCarthy and his followers already control the country. (157)

Ironically, our nationwide trend toward mass production and consumerism led many to become suburbanite conformists who, like the pod people, were happy because they were free from the anxiety and guilt of decision-making. This mindlessness becomes a mantra for the people after they are reborn as "pods" in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Toward the end of the film, baptismal images foreshadow Becky's rebirth as a "pod." In the cave where she and Miles retreat from the town's pod people, Becky falls asleep and succumbs to the pods. Afterwards, Miles kisses her and knows immediately that her lack of passion means that she is no longer human. Birth imagery continues in the final scene—certainly the most grotesque—in which one nurse tells another that babies stop crying after they turn into pods. This image reflects a fear for future generations growing up under the threat of communism and conformity.

A few years later, George Pal's *Time Machine* (1960) based on the H. G. Wells novel ushered in the 1960s science fiction with a subliminal antifeminist message that is couched in an anti-communist theme. First, when H. G. Wells, played by Rod Taylor, climbs into his elaborate wombic time machine to escape what he considers a barbaric culture—Victorian England—he looks out of the window in his home from the time machine's driver seat. From that vantage point, he watches the ladies' apparel shop-front containing a fully-dressed mannequin as he travels forward in time. From Wells's point of view shots, the audience can

witness years pass through the mannequin's fashion changes from Victorian matron to flapper girl to poodle-skirts to mini-dresses. In effect, the audience witnesses the history of the twentieth century's feminist movement through the image of women's fashion.

Eventually, the dress shop closes and is destroyed in World War III, after which Wells continues to zoom through time into the far distant future of the year 802,771, when the women's movement seems to have far exceeded its goals. In this seemingly utopian society the architecture, the costume, and the people all seem feminine. A huge Venus statue informs the viewer that the women's movement has moved past the dress-up stage and into a full-fledged matriarchy. The men and women are all dressed similarly. However, *The Time Machine's* message is so conservative that the Eloi's costumes have the trappings of the late 1950s early 1960s middle-class—with bras, short hair-cuts, make-up, and swimsuits in a tropical utopia.

After Wells disembarks the time machine, he witnesses a group of young, beautiful blond swimmers while he marvels that humanity has finally learned to live without war. When one of the young women starts to drown and none of her companions makes an attempt to save her, Wells dives to the rescue quickly learning that these people do not care whether they live or die.

Once night falls in the film, the viewer is inundated with a barrage of vaginal and womb images of caverns with jagged rocks jutting out the sides of the tunnels. This image of the *vagina dentata* represents the boundary between the above-ground world of the Eloi and the subterranean Morlocks. The image also represents the dangers inherent in trusting the Morlocks, who provide food, clothing, and shelter to the passive Eloi. The Morlocks are like evil parents in a "nuclear" family who signal the Eloi to their death chamber with an old Civil

Defense siren, a system designed to alert civilians to death by atomic bombs dropped by communists.

After learning that the Eloi are essentially livestock for the Morlock, Wells has to concede that war is necessary in order to free the Eloi, whom he describes as cattle for the cannibal Morlocks, a model which creates a mixed message with regard to war. Through war, Wells gives the Eloi's life meaning and serves to increase initiative and drive. Once the Morlock are left bloody and dying, the Eloi see a light at the end of a tunnel that represents their rebirth into humanity's rightful place on earth—on the top of the food chain.

Both the book and the film were successful in two similar eras. Both the late nineteenth century and the early 1960s witnessed early stages of women's movements immediately before their demands for equality became venomous. During these periods, men reassured themselves through books such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, at the expense of women's dignity. Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* explains:

It is certainly true that Dracula, the narrative's pivotal vampire, is a male, but the world in which he operates is a world of women, the world of Eve, a world in which reversion and acculturation are at war. . . . [A] personification of the past, [he] feeds on the blood of young girls to grow young again, for the bestial past lives in the blood of woman. . . . [His] predatory forces of atavistic bestiality symbolized by Dracula can begin their challenge to the evolutionary acculturation of British womanhood. For it is woman, after all, that the chilly count is after. . . . (342-343)

These kinds of insults fueled the fire for feminist writers and activists such as Cristabel Pankhurst in the early twentieth century, and Betty Friedan in 1963, when her book *The Feminine Mystique* was published. Both periods witnessed rapid technological advancements that could be used for a large scale world war. Some

of the fears that Wells and his contemporaries had regarding the future were justified, but not their scapegoating of women.

Throughout the late 1950s and well into the 1980s, the United States and our allies were on the brink of war with Soviet Russia. In 1960, France tested an atomic bomb in the Sahara desert, which no doubt influenced Chris Marker to write, direct, and produce *La Jetée* (1962), a French New Wave vision of post-apocalyptic Paris that Gillies MacKinnon, a filmmaker writing for *Sight and Sound*, considers one of the "classic films of all time." The twenty-nine minute photo-montage attempts to mimic snapshot memory as the protagonist travels back through time to save the future of the human race from extinction.

La Jetée begins with a shooting death at Orly airport shot from a pre-adolescent boy's point of view. The boy's memory haunts him after he is grown and a nuclear holocaust forces Parisians to reside underground because the city is radioactive and uninhabitable.

The establishing shots of the underground city feature wet, vaginal tunnels that lead to the dark underground womb beneath Paris, a network of subterranean galleries (fig. 42). Unfortunately, Mother Earth's womb cannot nourish its residents for long. Therefore, futuristic scientists want to send the protagonist back to the past to retrieve technology so that the human species will not become extinct. The voice-over narration informs the viewer that other previous time travelers either died or lost their minds because "*se réveiller dans un autre temps, c'était naître une seconde fois, adult*" (to be born again as an adult, the shock would be too great.) During the time travel scene, the still of the protagonist lying in bed is accompanied by the loud beating of a heart that mimics the sounds unborn fetuses hear while in their mother's wombs. Just as mother's heart rate increases prior to delivery, as our time-traveler returns to his past the sound-effects become louder and faster. The first image from his past that he sees is that of a museum filled with decapitated



Figure 42. Subterranean galleries from *La Jetee*

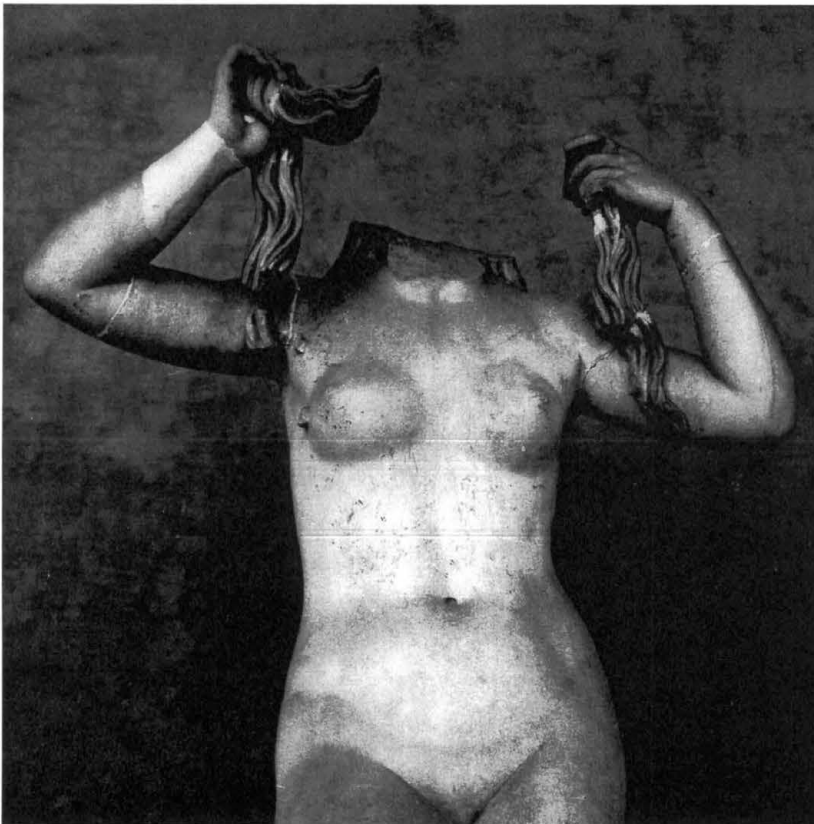


Figure 43. Decapitated statues from *La Jette*

female statuary (fig. 43). These images bring to mind the following lines from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ozymandias*:

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (281)

Shelley's sonnet, inspired by a huge statue erected in the desert by the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II, symbolizes the futility of all human striving to achieve immortality through earthly glory. Similarly, *La Jetée* implies that the protagonist's past and future have been destroyed first by war, then by time-travel, an act that is both mentally and physically exhausting. The scientists of his future hope that the protagonist's strong memory of the murder at the Orly airport will enable him to return to pre-apocalyptic Paris, where they hope he can gain knowledge of technology, an act that will return humanity to the surface of the earth and save the underground Parisians from extinction. Although, he finds love and happiness in the past, the time-traveler cannot find the resources the scientists need until he travels to the far-distant future, where the scientists help him return to his utopian

past. In addition, they help his society obtain the technology they need to return above-ground. However, their help proves fatal for the time-traveler, who realizes in the last frame of the film that he witnessed his own death as a child at the airport.

After the release of *La Jetée* in 1962, the rebirth imagery became a paradigm for cinematic time travel. However, another image also became a iconographic: The *Meet the Beatles* album cover and, most recently, an advertisement for the *Seinfeld* television program all use an image of disembodied heads that is are likely imitations of the scientists of the future in *La Jetée* .

CHAPTER XI
THE BIRTH OF LOVE: 1968

Is god dead?

—*Time Magazine* cover, April 8, 1966.

"I used to be cruel to my woman I beat her and kept her apart from the things that she loved man I was mean but I'm changing my scene and doing the best that I can."

—Lennon and McCartney, *Getting Better*, 1967

"And, in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make."

—Lennon and McCartney, *The End*, 1969

In 1968, three science fiction films also became paradigms for many movies released in years to come: *Barbarella*, *Queen of the Universe*, *Planet of the Apes*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Not only was 1968 the "summer of love," but it was also the year of science fiction blockbusters that reflected the free-love, free-sex, hedonistic attitude of that era. *Barbarella*, *Queen of the Universe* is a caricature, criticism, and culmination of both the feminist movement and the sexual revolution. Feminists considered the film just another example of male fantasy—and it was. However, in hindsight *Barbarella* appears to be that and much more. From today's perspective, the film is a confused allegory about the sexual liberation that men and women were experiencing at the time. Even today, *Barbarella* can be found throughout Europe as the name of many feminine beauty and clothing establishments becoming synonymous with female power through beauty that can be recognized worldwide.

On the surface, it appears that *Barbarella* (Jane Fonda) is sexually abused by myriad men and machines, but she is not a typical victim. This woman is having fun. Men and machines are not using her; she is using them. *Barbarella* is not much of a space heroine because she does little to save the universe! She's

supposed to get a Positronic ray from Durand Durand to protect the world from its destructive force. Instead, she crash lands her spaceship a couple of times and has a variety of sexual encounters that she agrees to in order to compensate her rescuers for their trouble. Therefore, it is easy to see why *Barbarella* angered feminists who were working toward sexual freedom and personal independence and away from sexual bondage that marriage and prostitution had historically represented to women.

Although *Barbarella* is far from quality cinema, it was a landmark film and has become a cult favorite. Apart from being a time capsule for an interesting period of history, the film has given many men—and women—a pleasurable, sensuous viewing experience without revealing a single nipple or pubic hair. All nudity was veiled—albeit thinly—using the film credits, weapons, clear plastic, costumes, and torn hosiery. Imagery and innuendo are what made *Barbarella* sensual, not nudity.

Fetal and birth imagery are abundant, starting from the opening sequence in which Barbarella drains blue fluid from her spacesuit while performing an antigravity striptease. Her hair is not wet; her makeup is perfect. She appears to be born from the same blue substance that claimed to sanitize suburban toilets on television commercials. She is chemically preserved in her perfect form; thus Barbarella is less (or more) than human. The audience is immediately informed that Barbarella is more Barbie doll than human. Her strange birth likens her to Aphrodite and Venus, goddesses of love and sexual intercourse from Greek and Roman mythology. As a matter of fact, a Venus statue is a secondary dominant image in the striptease *mise en scene* (fig. 44). After she awakes, she enters her fur-lined command central that appears to have eyes and a large, gaping mouth (fig. 45). This image has much in common with the Winchester Psalter's *The Jaws*



Figure 44. Striptease from *Barbarella*

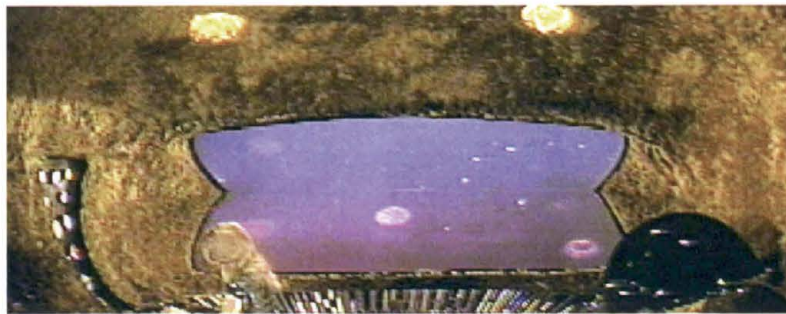


Figure 45. Command central from *Barbarella*



Figure 46. Barbarella's bloody navel from *Barbarella*



Figure 47. Machine of Excess Pleasure from *Barbarella*

of Hell, circa 1180 (fig. 22). Both are images of a controlled woman, whether she is a witch or a five-star astronavigatrix.

Throughout the film, the *mise en scene* is filled with sexual symbolism that informs the audience as to what types of sexual relations are considered good in a utopian future as opposed to examples of dystopian sexuality. After Barbarella crash lands her spaceship on the ice planet Lythion, she is stunned when twin girls accurately hit her head with a snowball containing a rock inside. The twins tie her up and take her to the remains of a spaceship flown by Durand Durand, who invented the Positronic Ray, the ultimate weapon. There she is attacked by a group of twin girls who surround her with remote-controlled dolls that slash Barbarella with their metallic, razor-sharp teeth while the girls gaze with sadistic glee. These are not baby dolls but large Barbie dolls with devouring, disfiguring teeth that become images of the *vagina dentata*. The dolls chew holes in Barbarella's legs, arms, and stomach. During the dynamic montage of the dolls' attack, one shot reveals Barbarella's navel in one of their mouths (fig. 46). However, when the large, rugged, handsome Mark Hand bursts in to save her, Barbarella body is only slightly damaged, but her outlandish outfit is destroyed. Mark Hand explains that children live in the icy forest of Wier until they reach a "serviceable age" when "catchmen" like himself capture them and turn them over to the authorities.

These unsupervised, evil children represent the only foreseeable retribution for free-love in the 1960s. *Barbarella's* production and release dates slip into a period that predates a well-tolerated birth control pill (the first birth control pills contained a high level of estrogen that caused unpleasant side-effects for many women who took it) or legalized abortion. Also, illegal, back-alley abortions were the only pregnancy-free option when unreliable birth control methods failed. Therefore, many children of the 1960s were the unwanted by-product of so-called free-love, and they devoured time, money, and reputations.

When Mark Hand suggests making love to Barbarella in lieu of the government compensation that she offers, she pulls out what she calls "exaltation transference pill" that undoubtedly encouraged many viewers in 1967 to consider birth control pills. Barbarella explains that on Earth in the year 40,000, sexuality has evolved because the "old-fashioned way" was too distracting. However, Barbarella's pills are a way to achieve the ultimate orgasm of the future as well as a method of increasing "ego support and self esteem" without removing one's clothes. Hand declines. As his name suggests, Hand wants to make love the "old-fashioned way," meaning that clothes are removed. Barbarella ungracefully removes her tattered garments inside Hand's "icecraft," which appears to be a wind-propelled womb and vagina-shaped craft that glides silently across the ice. When she reclines into a semi-transparent vaginal tube, she is surrounded by the concentric circles inside the cocoon in which they make physical love. After her first physical orgasm and apparent loss of her virginity, her rebirth as a full-fledged woman is symbolized in the animal skin outfit that Hand gives her to wear. Complete with phallic tail, the outfit symbolizes the awakening of her animal, sexual nature. Barbarella hums a blissful tune that informs the audience that although she enjoyed the experience, she understands her culture's assessment. She points out that she sees "what they mean when they say its distracting."

Barbarella leaves Hand, crash-lands into a labyrinth, and meets the angel Pygar who flies her to Sogo, where she is saved from gang rape by a one-eyed lesbian (Anita Pallenberg) who wears a phallic horn on her head and calls Barbarella "Pretty Pretty." Later we learn that the lesbian is the Great Tyrant. She explains that her kingdom rests on the Mathmos, a living substance that feeds on evil and looks like a placenta. The kingdom of Sogo is connected by vaginal transport tubes that swoop Barbarella from one reality to another, during which time she has two artificial sexual experiences. First, she and Dildano (David

Hemmings) have sex using the Exhaltation Transference Pills, which leads to hair-curling ecstasy. Then the Great Tyrant's concierge (Milo O'Shea) attempts to assassinate Barbarella by placing her inside the Machine of Excess Pleasure (fig. 47)—a large vagina-shaped machine that is designed to kill through excessive sexual pleasure. However, Barbarella's sexual pleasure capacity is so great that she breaks the Great Tyrant's machine.

At this point in the film, the *vagina/vagina dentata* dichotomy is established: male-initiated, male-dominated, pregnancy-free sexual intercourse is punctuated with *mise en scenes* of erotic *vagina fecunda* imagery, while unnatural, female-initiated sexual scenes are filled with *vagina dentata* imagery in which death and sex are intermingled. The myriad sexual symbols utilized in *Barbarella Queen of the Universe* are so excessive that to discuss each symbol would become as tedious as the film itself. Suffice to say that French filmmaker Roger Vadim's overt use of sexual symbolism was the main reason this film became such a landmark. Vadim set up a paradigm of positive and negative sexual images in the modern science fiction genre that have become iconographic in later film and other art forms.

While *Barbarella* was under production in France, *Planet of the Apes* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* were in the works in the United States and Great Britain respectively. Thematically, both films consider humanity's next evolutionary step. Because the Cold War combined with the women's movement caused considerable anxiety with regard to both women and the future, Stanley Kubrick's landmark *2001: A Space Odyssey*, enormously popular science fiction film featuring *vagina dentata* imagery grossed \$8.5 million during its year of release. The film's moon landing incorporates *vagina dentata* imagery in a film which suggests—far ahead of its time—that the seduction of artificial intelligence and outer space could lead to humanity's replacement.

Kubrick's uses vaginal imagery throughout the film as a cinematic metaphor for the maternal element in humanity's evolutionary steps of development. Robert Graves describes the "unseen" goddess:

Sometimes, in reading a poem [or watching a film], the hairs will bristle at an apparently unpeopled and eventless scene described in it, if the elements bespeak her unseen presence clearly enough: for example, when owls hoot, the moon rides like a ship through scudding cloud, trees sway slowly together above a rushing waterfall, and a distant barking of dogs is heard; or when a peal of bells in frosty weather suddenly announces the birth of the New Year. (Graves 25)

The first stage occurs after the ape-men encounter the first monolith and take a baptismal swim in a natural pond. Afterward, they learn to use bones as tools and quickly understand that those tools lead to domination through warring acts of aggression—human "progress." Their exile is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden to be reborn into the consciousness that we call humanity.

The second evolutionary step occurs when a modern spaceship lands on the moon through a space port looks like a gaping, toothed mouth (fig. 48). The port in turn opens in yet another *vagina dentata* image representing human technological "progress." At this point, the space travelers find a second monolith emitting a painful, high-pitched tone directs toward the distant planet, Jupiter.

The third evolutionary step begins when a spaceship is sent to Jupiter. The spaceship pays homage to the Great Goddess in the shape of its design, with circular hallways and thresholds (fig. 49, 50). As astronaut, Dave Bowman, "murders" HAL, the on-board computer, crawling through tunnels toward light—images of rebirth to depict the death of Hal's artificial intelligence (fig. 51). As Dave approaches Jupiter, the birth imagery becomes more prolific (fig. 52, 53). These images alert the viewer that Dave is approaching his fated destination, that of



Figure 48. Moon Space Port from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.



Figure 49. Jogging from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.



Figure 50. Telling secrets from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.



Figure 51. Climbing to the Light from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.

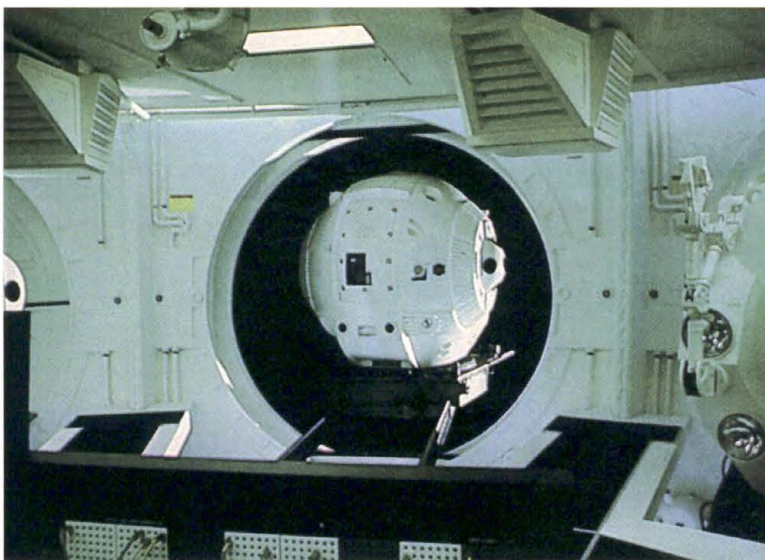


Figure 52. Birth of Space Pod from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.

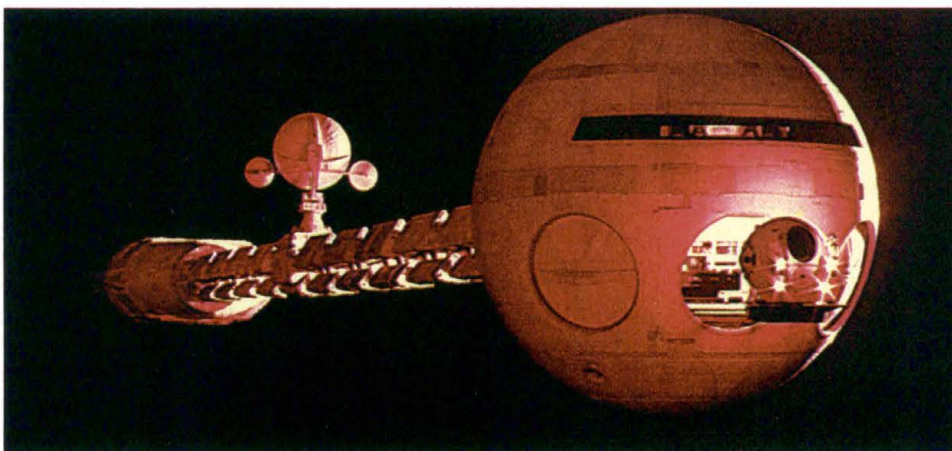


Figure 53. Exterior of Space Pod Birth from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.

mating with the Great Goddess. In the climax, the spaceship's approach to Jupiter features a striking orgasmic sequence and fertilization image through a *vagina fecunda* (fig. 54). Upon landing on Jupiter, Dave finds himself in a room decorated in a feminine French Provincial style (fig. 55). For the first time in the film, Dave eats solid, appetizing food served by the unseen woman who seems to be responsible for the creation of the monoliths and the feminine space in which houses Dave. He crawls into bed and begins to age drastically, perhaps in response to mating with the Mother Goddess, whom the viewer can faintly hear giggling in the background. The film ends with the image of a fetus, an apparent product of the sexual union between the human male and the Goddess and therefore representative of humanity's next evolutionary step. The final shot features the Starchild, an infant who is the product of the union between man and Goddess (fig. 56).

This filmic deification of the female occurred when women had begun to rally for equal rights. At this point, the war between the sexes was not yet in full swing, perhaps because abortion was still illegal. Abortion-rights served to vilify feminists as murderers of their own children in the minds of some conservative thinkers.

Franklin J. Schaffner's *Planet of the Apes* continue exploring the issues of evolution, war, racism, and sexism through a role-reversal with apes, chimpanzees, and orangutans possessing human traits while humans are more animalistic.

The film begins with a spacecraft crash-landing in a body of water, a place of rebirth for George Taylor (Charlton Heston). Afterwards, he and his fellow astronauts awake from the suspended animation, which has allowed them to travel long distances through space without aging or dying. However, one astronaut does not awake. The only female astronaut conveniently aged and died when her life support system failed. The cryogenic wombs that kept the men youthful and healthy left the woman a dead crone (fig. 57). She was buried alive in an icy womb



Figure 54. Stargate Orgasm from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.



Figure 55. French Provincial Bedroom from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.



Figure 56. Moonchild from *2001: A Space Odyssey*



Figure 57. Dead Crone from *Planet of the Apes*

that could not sustain her life. The frightening close-up image of an aged corpse serves to reflect the notion that women are not appropriate choices for astronauts as well as underscoring the female fear of aging. As a matter of fact, in the late 1960s, the United States sent a number of men into outer space and argued that women's bodies would not tolerate space travel. Although the U.S.S.R. sent a woman into space in 1963, NASA said that there were problems of menstruation and urination that could not be overcome. Therefore, the film reinforces NASA's disapproval of women in space by making it undesirable to female viewers.

After Taylor discovers the female astronaut dead, he and the other two male astronauts trek across this mysterious planet in search of life and food. We learn about Taylor's cynicism with regard to humanity, war, and the United States when they place the American flag on the desert planet and Taylor laughs uproariously, saying, "Everyone we have ever known is dead."

After a long and desperate search for any sign of life, they reach an oasis that serves as an Eden to the three men who believe they are the only inhabitants of this strange planet. They ecstatically jump into natural pool of water, the second birth image, leaving their clothes on the side to be stolen by unseen thieves. At this point, the men are reborn again—naked as the day they were born—as part of a tribe of silent humans who turn out to be prey and slaves for apes on horseback. Without clothes, the handsome, muscular, nearly naked astronauts, especially Taylor, become what Laura Mulvey calls the object of the gaze that she reserves for females. (6) However, in *Running Scared*, a discourse on male sexuality in film, Peter Lehman suggests that this kind of representation can be viewed as pro-feminist:

. . . [T]he silence surrounding the sexual representation of the male body is itself totally in the service of traditional patriarchy and that critical work by

men can complement, rather than displace or silence, feminist women's voices. (4)

Naked except for loin cloths, the men suffer in their new existence as slaves among a race of intelligent apes as one astronaut is lobotomized, another is murdered and stuffed for a museum exhibit, and Taylor is imprisoned and mistaken for a nonspeaking native human because he was shot in the throat and left temporarily unable to make a sound. As soon as his voice is recovered, Taylor speaks to two chimpanzee scientists, Cornelius (Roddy McDowell) and Zira (Kim Hunter), about how the apes consider humans stupid and unevolved while Taylor insists that on his planet the reverse is true. Cornelius and Zira are fiancés and their love is symbolized by a chaste kiss that makes them giggle with a degree of modesty, which indicates that they behave in a civilized fashion. This contrasts with Taylor, who has random sex with a mute human native who is tossed into his cell for the purpose of procreation. Subsequently, Taylor's procreativity is nearly ended forever when he is slated to be gelded. Taylor's sexuality is ultimately preserved, but the implication is still there. Humanity—especially the male gender—does not deserve to reproduce because of the destructive nature that produced no fewer than four wars in the twentieth century before 1968. With the controversial Vietnam conflict underway, many people were questioning the point of war, especially a civil war in an Asian jungle thousands of miles away as well as a fear that the only way to end the communist threat would be to deploy an atomic bomb that might destroy the world.

Throughout the film, Taylor learns that the apes came into power only after the human inhabitants nearly destroyed the world during their last major war. This message is fully realized in the last scene when humanity's loss is symbolized by a broken and partially buried Statue of Liberty. She represents the Mother Goddess who stands disappointed in her children for their inhumanity. She stands over that

wasteland that was once New York City in a stance of anger and sadness over what the earth has become while Taylor and his mute girlfriend ride off into what one of the simian scientists refers to as their "destiny."

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRTH OF BLASPHEMY: THE 1970s

"God is a concept by which we measure our pain."

--John Lennon, *God*

Rape imagery in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* represented the guilt about the past and fear for the future in our collective unconsciousness regarding the violence of the 1960s and 1970s. After the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, and the shocking Tate-LaBianca, Western society became obsessed with violence caused by the war in Vietnam and race riots driven by forced de-segregation in schools and in the streets. In addition, the Cold War had reached its most violent climax with the ubiquity of nuclear weaponry throughout the world. People thought that the end was near, so they might as well party with sex, drugs, and rock and roll on the assumption that tomorrow they might die.

Released in 1971, *A Clockwork Orange* features futuristic Droogs who torture their victims with sadistic glee after drinking milk laced with mescaline from ceramic breasts at the Koroba Milk Bar, a setting which contains misogynistic furniture designed by Allen Jones: these feature nude mannequins contorted into backbends (fig. 58), what Laura Mulvey describes as images of "bondage and torture" (8). Other violent sexual imagery appears throughout the film. For example, the first victim of the principal character, Alex's, gang is an elderly, homeless man beaten bloody with Alex's phallic cane in a symbolic rape.

Later, Alex and his droogs rape and torture three women who resemble the three Greek Fates, the *Moirae* or triple goddesses, Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis. First they gang rape a young woman analogous to the first Fate, Clotho. In the film, *A Clockwork Orange*, the character is a nude, virginal, young woman. (In Anthony Burgess's novel, she is described as being only twelve, but this alteration was

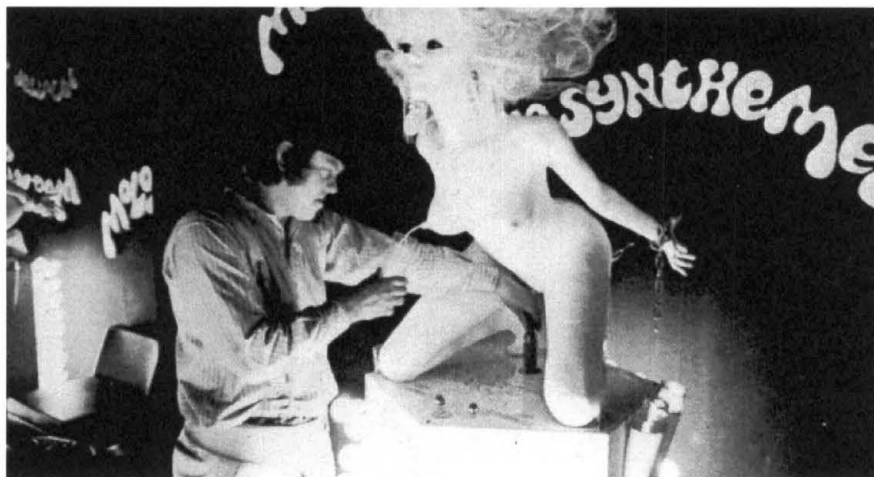


Figure 58. Koroba Milk Bar from *A Clockwork Orange*

made, no doubt, to appease the censors.) After the rape, rival gangs fight over her body in a scene played out in grotesque, rhythmic montage choreographed to Rossini's *Overture to the Barber of Seville*.

Next, Alex and his droogs rape and murder a woman and cripple her writer husband in a grotesque dance, with an ironic, semi-diegetic soundtrack of *Singing in the Rain*. Kubrick emphasizes the wife's maternal link to Atropos when he shows Alex cutting away that part of the costume that covers each breast. The crippling damage to the husband serves as an image of castration. He not only loses his wife, the object of his affection, but also his ability to walk. The audience can assume that he is alone and no longer able or willing to have sexual intercourse with anyone else.

The rape imagery continues back at Alex's room in his parent's home where he listens to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony while Christian imagery dances across the screen in another rhythmic montage. Meanwhile, Alex's pet snake crawls in between the spread legs of a woman illustrated on a poster on the wall.

Alex's rape and murder spree ends with the Cat Woman, who may be seen as a representation of Lachesis, the old crone who cuts the thread of life. After he rapes the young girl in the theatre, the young wife in her home, and the crone amongst her sexual art, then Alex is "reborn" in prison, where he befriends the chaplain. Alex expresses an intense interest in reading the Bible, but the minister is unaware that Alex's fascination comes from his pleasure over Christ's torture at the hands of Pontius Pilate, with whom Alex identifies.

The minister arranges for Alex to be rehabilitated, using a new technique that guarantees a commuted sentence of only two weeks of intense therapy. Alex's behavior modification, consisting of visual and aural stimulation combined with drug-induced nausea which renders him unable to respond violently to any situation. This stimulation is achieved using a device that encircles Alex's head

like a crown of thorns and pins his eyes open. Afterwards, Alex is reborn as a Christ figure, unable to enjoy sadism.

Afterwards, Alex, like Christ, becomes the victim and the world is his sadist. He cannot listen to Beethoven or defend himself without intense nausea. Repeatedly, Alex's victims seek cruel revenge because they have read in the newspapers that he cannot fight back. After Alex is nearly beaten to death, he is taken to a hospital where his body and mind are treated and returned to normal. In Alex's case "normal" means that he can happily fantasize about raping a young woman, leaving the audience perplexed about the importance of free will and the government's role in violence control. The rape imagery throughout serves to symbolize both underworld and governmental power and therefore calls into question how much control one group should have over another.

Star Wars also contains themes based the socio-political climate of the 1970s. During production in 1976, four short years after the *Roe versus Wade* decision that legalized abortions, the Women's Rights Movement was in full swing. The fact that the Rebellion represents good and that its leaders are women serves to reflect the strong feminist element present in the cultural milieu. Throughout the trilogy, the commanders of the Rebellion, Princess Leia Organa and Rebel Leader Mon Mothma, are both women.

The film begins with a woman dressed in white, stealthily combing the halls of a spaceship sporting a large handgun—a phallic virgin princess (fig. 59). Princess Leia is captured by Darth Vader, who uses a drug-filled syringe to extract the truth from her, a form of symbolic rape. He fails because Leia's commitment to the Rebellion and the strength of her will prevent her from disclosing the location of the new rebel base to Vader (although she is obviously tortured by her resistance.)

According to *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Lucas "wanted a princess. . . but . . . didn't want her to be a passive damsel in distress" (50). Therefore, he



Figure 59. Leia with Gun from *Star Wars*

borrowed from the *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale in which the evil queen casts a spell on Beauty that causes her to sleep for one hundred years. Indeed, the princess is asleep when Luke comes to her rescue, but instead of a kiss he receives sarcasm: "Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?" Although her response is not that of the original *Sleeping Beauty*, both tales require that the rescuer brave a *vagina dentata* in order to save the princess. Just as the prince has to climb through the thorny briar in order to awaken the princess, Luke must climb through serrated openings in Darth Vader's spaceship (fig. 60).

These images of the *vagina dentata* reflect the film's consumption motif brilliantly, a pattern that is connected to the Dark Side of the Force, a power which seduced Darth Vader—according to former Jedi Knight, Obiwan Kenobi. In the first segment, Darth Vader's Stormtroopers enter toothy openings in Darth Vader's spaceship (fig. 60). After Luke, Han, and Chewbacca enter the ship, they are forced into a garbage chute. Joseph Campbell describes such imagery as an homage to the situation found in the Jonah and the whale story from the Bible:

The belly is the dark place where digestion takes place and new energy is created. The story of Jonah in the whale is an example of a mythic theme that is practically universal, of the hero going into a fish's belly and ultimately coming out again transformed (*Power*, 180).

Campbell's earlier work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, a book that George Lucas read in college and used as a basis for the *Star Wars* series, explains that the whale's belly is not only an image of digestion, but also a womb symbol:

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale (Campbell, *Hero*, 90)

Therefore, *Star Wars'* consumption motif can also be interpreted as vaginal, threshold imagery—a Medieval-looking entrance into the hellish realm of Darth

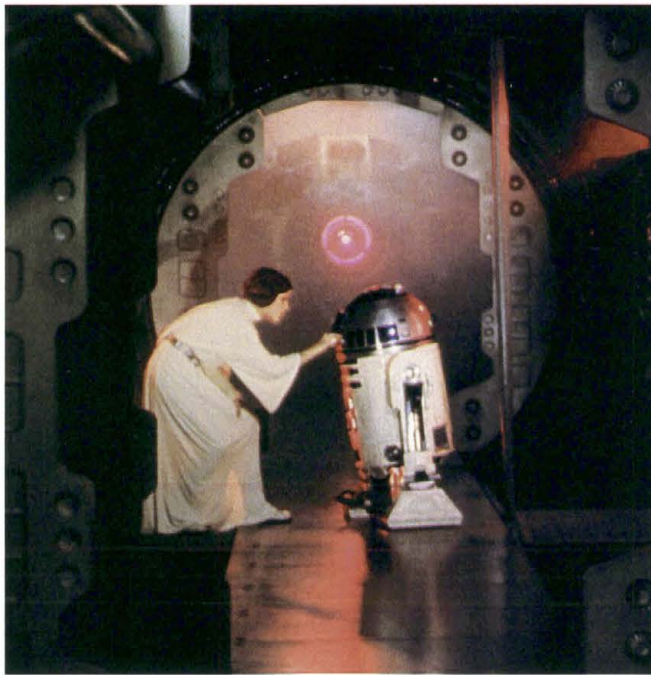


Figure 60. Deathstar thresholds from *Star Wars*

Vader. These visual metaphors of spiritual death are ubiquitous in hero myths and symbolize the threshold of the hero's adventure.

Such vaginal images also mirror Leia's strength as the only experienced warrior. Luke Skywalker spent his teenage years working on his uncle's farm while Han Solo pirated in his *Millennium Falcon*, a fast, but out-of-date spaceship. Leia is justifiably critical of the men's out-of-control discharge of their phallic weapons. She maintains her virginal composure and control even in the most tense situations, whereas Luke and Han "shoot off" or ejaculate their weapons at every sound.

The next installment, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), begins on the ice-bound planet of Hoth, which symbolizes Leia's resistance to her own sexual desires. Stationed at this remote location, sexual tensions run high among the trio, but Leia resists Han's antagonistic flirtations such as when he says, "You could use a kiss." Not only does the ice reflect her frigidity, but her white snowsuit illustrates her role as the ice princess in a frozen land, where Luke almost dies. After Han rescues him from sure death in the icy landscape of Hoth, Luke is placed in a water-filled aquarium for rebirth and clothed in a diaper to fully illustrate and foreshadow an emotional rebirth—his transformation from young hero to Jedi Knight.

During Luke's near-death experience, he experiences a vision of his first mentor, Obiwan Kenobi, who tells him to go to Dagobah and meet with the Jedi Master, Yoda. After the Rebel base falls under Empire attack, the trio become separated and Luke heads for Dagobah. Before arriving, Luke uses his spaceship to get information about the planet. He finds that there are no buildings, but a lot of "life force" on the swamp planet. Not long after Luke lands on Dagobah, he encounters a small, strange-looking creature, who insists that he eat dinner with him in his tree cave. Impatient, Luke complains that they are wasting time and that

he would like to see the Jedi Master immediately. The creature refuses until they dine together. During the course of the meal, Luke realizes that the creature is Yoda. He also notices that there is "something familiar about this place," familiar in the Freudian sense because the cave is filled with maternal imagery (fig. 61) that represents Luke's experience inside of his mother's womb. The power of the Force is the uncivilized influence of the feminine—that which is natural is associated with that which is good. Likewise, the power of the Dark Side is associated with the technological and mechanical imagery of the Empire, which relentlessly attacks the feminine element of the Rebels.

During the Imperial attack, when Luke and R2D2 escape to Dagobah, Han, Leia, C3P0, and Chewy take flight in the Millennium Falcon through an asteroid field and into a cave. While attempting to repair the spaceship, Han relentlessly teases Leia about her obvious crush on him. As Leia begins to fall in love with Han and as she becomes a sexualized woman, she loses her composure—and her masculine power. She begins to make statements to Han that imply his piloting competence and her technological inferiority, "I hope you make a mistake and I'm there to see it." However, when the error occurs it nearly costs them their lives. Han's response acknowledges the lunacy of Leia's earlier remark, "It looks like you'll get your wish."

Obviously, the princess has had no prior sexual experience, while Han knows how to intimidate, and perhaps please, a woman. As she loses her icy demeanor to sexual desire, the landscape warms as well. Immediately after the couple's first kiss, interrupted by CP30—the effeminate and perhaps homosexual android—they leave the ship to determine exterior damage. Although Han describes the asteroid as having "a lot of moisture," an obvious allusion to Leia's lust for him, Han immediately realizes that they are not in a cave, but in the mouth of a creature. Therefore, the consumption/rebirth motif appears again as they



Figure 61. Yoda's cave from *The Empire Strikes Back*

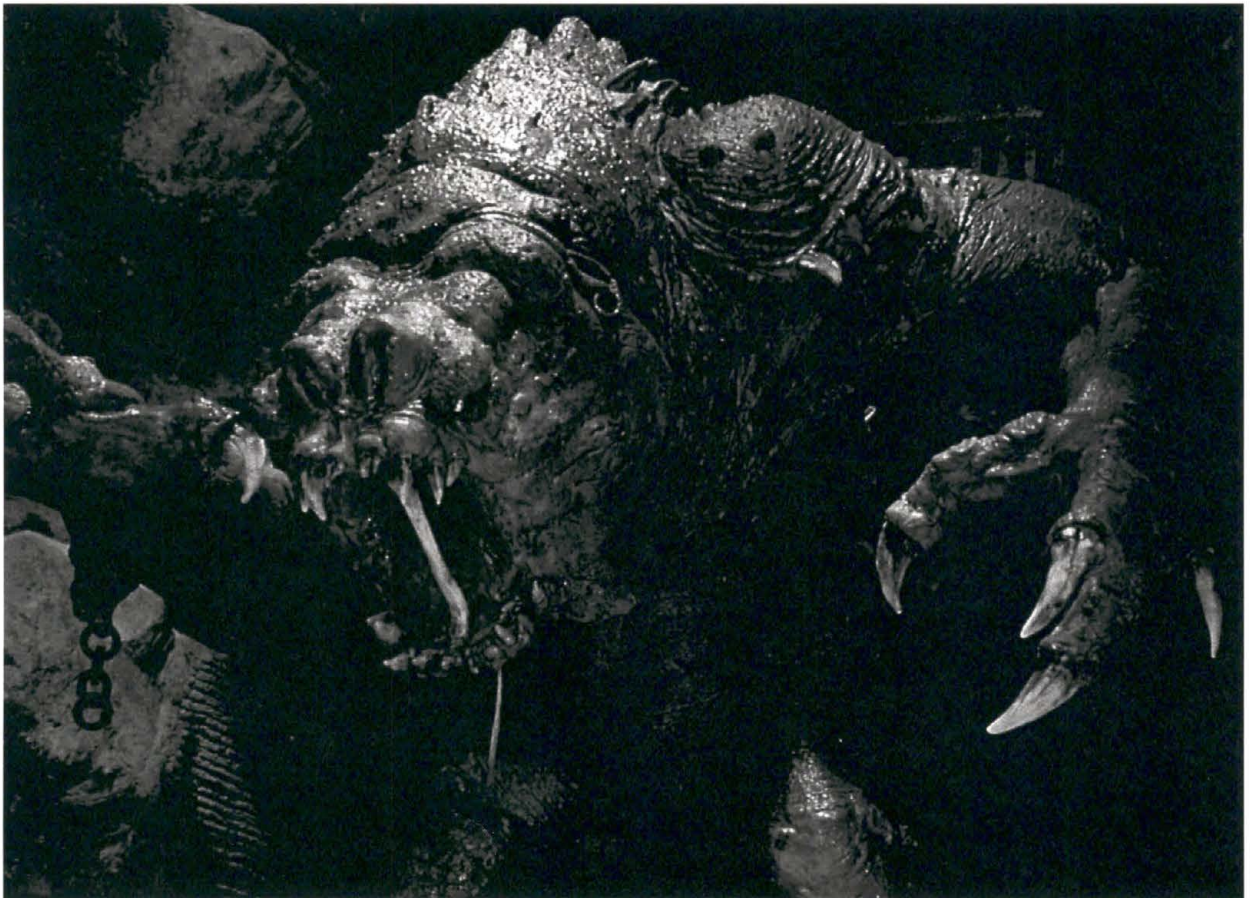


Figure 62. Space Dragon from *The Return of the Jedi*

quickly board the Falcon and exit through jaws of the creature, who has begun to close his mouth to swallow his victims. This time the couple is reborn as lovers when they expel themselves out of the creatures mouth—another image of the *vagina dentata*. Han breaks through the teeth of the vaginal creature that serves as a visual metaphor for breaking Leia's hymen, sexual imagery found in both Native American mythology and *Forbidden Planet* (see Chapter IX). Afterwards, instead of the phallic power of weaponry, Leia gains use of the feminine power of the Force.

After they escape, Luke and Leia head to Cloud City where Han hopes that his old friend, Lando Calrissian, will help them. However, Lando is helpless against the Empire and he turns over the couple to Darth Vader, who uses them as bait so that Luke will come to their rescue. Luke intuitively feels that the couple is in trouble, quits his Jedi training, and races to Cloud City, where he loses his hand in a light saber battle with Darth Vader, whom he has just learned is his father. This symbolic castration links Luke with priests and monks who take a vow of celibacy in order to pursue the spiritual instead of following earthbound pleasures. In this process, they also become feminized. As Luke becomes more feminine, Leia's awakening sexuality allows her to connect with the Force enough to hear Luke's cries for help. She pilots the spaceship to the exact location where Luke is hanging from scaffolding, high in the air, by the one hand that he still has left.

In the last scene, Luke has built himself a fully-functioning prosthetic hand that allows him to live a normal life; however, this melding of man and machine calls to mind the cyborg nature of Luke's father Darth Vader, leading the audience to wonder if this is Luke's first step toward the Dark Side.

The Return of the Jedi begins with R2D2 and C3P0 entering a cave that is obviously occupied by members of the Dark Side, as suggested in the toothy *vagina dentata*-shaped entrance. The cave is indeed occupied by Jabba the Hut, who is holding Han Solo after Darth Vader has encased him in a carbon-freezing

chamber, a womb-like tomb that has kept him in suspended animation since the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Leia has a plan to save her *amour*. Disguised as the bounty-hunter Boushh, Leia forces her way into Jabba's court. There, she melts Han's carbonite shell, "allowing him to rise miraculously from the dead" (Henderson 93).

Although Han has been reborn, he is temporarily blinded by the freezing process, action which constituting a symbolic castration, much like Luke's loss of his arm. Together they try to escape, but Jabba catches them. He imprisons Han and makes Leia his concubine, where her sexuality is exploited until Luke saves them all by defeating Jabba's minions. These figures are associated with several images of the *vagina dentata* and Luke is the mythological hero who slays the toothy dragon to save the princess or the prince who climbs the thorny rosebushes to rescue the sleeping princess from her one-hundred-year sleep.

Luke's heroic nature is foreshadowed when the cave door with its toothy edges opens automatically. He kills the rancor, a space dragon (fig. 62) that attacks him with a drooling vaginal mouth and long fingernails. Jabba orders the trio thrown into the mouth of the sarlacc, a most distinct image of the *vagina dentata* (fig 63), where they are to suffer a long death of over one thousand years as the creature digests them. Luke saves them when he uses the telekinetic power of the Force to retrieve his light saber.

By the time the last installment, *The Return of the Jedi* (1983) was released, Leia has become a "damsel in distress." In her attempt to rescue Han Solo from Jabba the Hut, she is captured and forced to become part of his harem. She is forced to wear a revealing belly dancer costume; she cannot free herself.

Luke Skywalker saves his friends, then returns to Dagobah where he finds his mentor, Yoda, in the grips of death. Yoda tells Luke that the "Force runs strong in your family" and that "there is another Skywalker." After Yoda dies, Obiwan



Figure 63. The Sarlacc from *The Return of the Jedi*

Kenobi appears to tell Luke that Leia is his twin sister and that both of them were hidden at birth from their father, Darth Vader, the former Anakin Skywalker because Vader was afraid of their innate power.

The motifs of twins and the devouring father appear frequently in classical mythology. The Romans had their tale of Romulus and Remus (see Chapter IV) while the Greeks had Apollo and Artemis (see Chapter III) as examples of divine twins. In *Star Wars*, the hiding of the Skywalker twins mirrors the tale of Chronos devouring his children to prevent them from usurping his throne. In the myth, when Rhea's youngest son, Zeus, is born, she gives Chronos a stone to swallow instead. Then she hides her son from Chronos until Zeus is old enough to obtain a potion that causes his father to vomit his siblings. This strategy allows Zeus to indeed take over the universe, just as Luke does at the end of *Return of the Jedi*.

When Luke approaches Leia with the fact that they are siblings, she responds that she has unconsciously known it all along. She also tells Luke about their mother, whom he never knew. It is therefore assumed that Luke and Leia's deceased mother was also connected to the Force and was part of the Rebellion because Leia describes her as "kind but sad."

If Darth Vader is the embodiment of the Dark Side, then his wife and mother of his children must represent the Force, although specific questions about her are left unanswered. Why was she sad? How did she die? Did Darth Vader kill her when she would not relinquish to the Force? One can only assume that she sided with the Force and that she is responsible for the good in her children.

Vader's deceased wife, mother of Luke and Leia, becomes what Robert Graves' identifies as the White Goddess:

The test of a poet's vision, one might say, is the accuracy of his portrayal of the White Goddess and of the island over which she rules. The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin

crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Must, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust—the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death. (24)

The mother goddess cannot be ignored. As in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, she appears in *Star Wars* as the imagery of the Force, the Dark Side, and in the symbols of her daughter's developing sexuality.

This powerful feminine element was part of our collective unconscious during the 1970s. For example, in 1972, the year the Supreme Court of the United States declared that abortion was legal, an Equal Rights Amendment was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification. The year before *Return of the Jedi* was released, the Equal Rights Amendment had not been ratified by the required thirty-eight states at its 1982 deadline and was defeated because of strong conservative opposition. Therefore, the three parts of the *Star Wars Trilogy* reflect the shift in attitudes regarding feminine power that occurred during the 1970s. Early in the decade, women's power was defined in terms of assimilation with the patriarchal culture—power and careers. However, toward the end of the decade, feminine power came to be defined as separate from masculine power after a number of tragedies befell male endeavors, such as the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal in 1973, and the Three-Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979.

In the late 1970s, femininity and the anti-nuclear movement merged in our collective unconscious when women became involved in several environmental disasters that occurred. In 1979, a federal jury at Oklahoma City awarded \$10.5 million to the estate of Karen Silkwood after she was murdered before she could report that highly dangerous plutonium was missing from the Kerr-McGee nuclear power plant located near Crescent, Oklahoma. That same year, children and pregnant women were evacuated from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area after an

accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear generating station. In August of that year, Love Canal made headlines after scores of residents were evacuated from houses built over an abandoned excavation site used from 1947 to 1953 to dump toxic chemical waste. The high incidence of birth defects that had been reported in the neighborhood placed emphasis again on women and children.

Such incidents prompted the kind of environmental concern that Rachel Carson had predicted in the late 1950s. As a result, in 1980 President Carter enacted the Superfund program under the Environmental Protection Agency. Anne Gorsuch-Burford and Rita Lavelle ran the program until 1983, when President Reagan fired Lavelle and forced Burford to resign. Feminism and environmentalism coalesced into movements that were promoted by many of the same people, including ecofeminist authors Marilou Awaikta, Emily Culpepper, and Caroline Merchant.

In the *Star Wars* trilogy, Princess Leia's power ceases to be defined by her phallic weapon or her acid tongue. As she becomes sexualized she becomes more natural as evidenced in one of the last scenes of the trilogy with Leia living among the Ewoks, dressing in soft suede, and wearing her long, glorious hair down instead of in her trademark double-braided buns. At this point, she understands her legacy of feminine power derived from the Force and begins to utilize this knowledge to inquire about the safety of Luke as a mother would.

Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) continues the *Star Wars* trilogy's exploration of the nature of maternal power and corporate control. The monstrous element of Ridley Scott's ground-breaking film has been thoroughly documented by such authorities as Barbara Creed and Carol Clover as *vagina dentata* images, although the alien is quite phallic. As a matter of fact, this is an early image of the *phallus dentatus*, used to fight the phallic woman. Indeed, the eggs were laid by the unseen mother (fig. 64), one who gave birth to offspring using a man (Kane) as an

incubator. Wildly popular in the United States a year before the Equal Rights Amendment lost in three states, the alien represents male corporate power bearing down on women on the workforce. Sigourney Weaver's character, Ripley (as in *Believe It or Not*) has a job—not a great job—but she does her work as well as the men around her. Through Ripley, the audience understands that in this version of the future, women are the equal of men in the workplace. The toughest human in the film, it seems the only thing that can defeat her is a penis with teeth (fig. 65). But, in the eleventh hour, Ripley uses her feminine sexuality to defeat the alien, when she seductively dons her spacesuit.

When Ripley is left alone after the alien kills the rest of her crew, the camera takes on the alien's point of view. Thinking she is alone, Ripley strips down to her scant underwear and spreads her legs for the alien/camera. She seems vulnerable, but the phallic alien and the audience are distracted by her raw sexuality. She quickly aborts the evil fetus out of her space pod, pets her pussy(cat), and drifts off into hypersleep.

Alien's box-office (\$60.2 million) and video (\$40.3 million) grosses reveal that Ripley and her alien fascinated both men and women in a stereotypically male genre—perhaps due to the birth imagery. Pregnant women often speak of how their bodies seem to have been taken over by an alien presence. Fetuses turn and churn in their mothers' bellies, with the feeling that their baby might burst out at any time. When the alien bursts from Kane's body, both genders are struck with fear of childbirth and the demonic child. The child of that birth also reflects the fear of the unknown with regard both to bearing children and what the future holds for them. In the rapidly changing scientific and technological milieu of the late 1970s, potential parents began to scrutinize the ethics of bring children into an uncertain future. Many people opted for birth-control or abortion practices, which led to theological, philosophical musings explored in such works as Anne Rice's *The*



Figure 64. *Birth Canals* (1979). Dir. Ridley Scott. Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.



Figure 65. *The Alien* (1979). Dir. Ridley Scott. Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.

Witching Hour (1990), an instant bestseller exploring the issue of reproductive freedom when the central character, Michael Curry, muses about horror films with fetuses such as *Alien*, *The Fly*, *Eraserhead*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*:

Take Ridley Scott's *Alien* for instance, where the little monster is born right out of the chest of a man, a squealing fetus who then retains its curious shape, even as it grows large, gorging itself upon human victims. . . . What must this mean, Michael tried to figure out. Not that we suffer guilt for what we do, for we believe it is morally right to control the birth of our young, but that we have uneasy dreams of all those little beings washed, unborn, into eternity? Or was it mere fear of the beings themselves who want to claim us—eternally free adolescents—and make us parents. Fetuses from hell! He laughed bitterly at the whole idea in spite of himself. (68-69).

Rice's novel and Scott's film both seem to reinforce the Right to Life movement's message that pro-choice feminists are murderers of their own children.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BIRTH OF CYBERCULTURE: THE 1980s

Gynecologic is such a beautiful metaphor for the mind/body split.

---David Cronenberg

The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

---Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*.

In the two years after *Alien's* box office success, the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution failed to become ratified on June 30, 1980. Science fiction films released in the years after its failure feature a decidedly different feminist landscape. *Blade Runner* (1982), another Ridley Scott vision, taps into the deep-seated fear that our newest slave—technology—will revolt against its captor—humanity. Historically, slaves and women have both revolted on a number of occasions because of unfair treatment by members of the establishment. The ongoing debate over women and civil rights is best explored through the depiction of the replicant Pris (Daryl Hannah) "a basic pleasure model." Although she was constructed to have sex with military officers stationed on off-world satellites, Pris attempts to choke the life out of protagonist and replicant-hunter, Decker (Harrison Ford), by squeezing her legs around his neck (fig. 66). By using her vagina in an attempt to murder Decker, Pris becomes the image of the *vagina dentata*. She once used her body to sexually please men, but now she employs her vagina in a revolt against the society that enslaves her.

After *Alien* and *Blade Runner* were released on video, millions of viewers enjoyed multiple viewings. At this time, Scott's films became subjects of intense

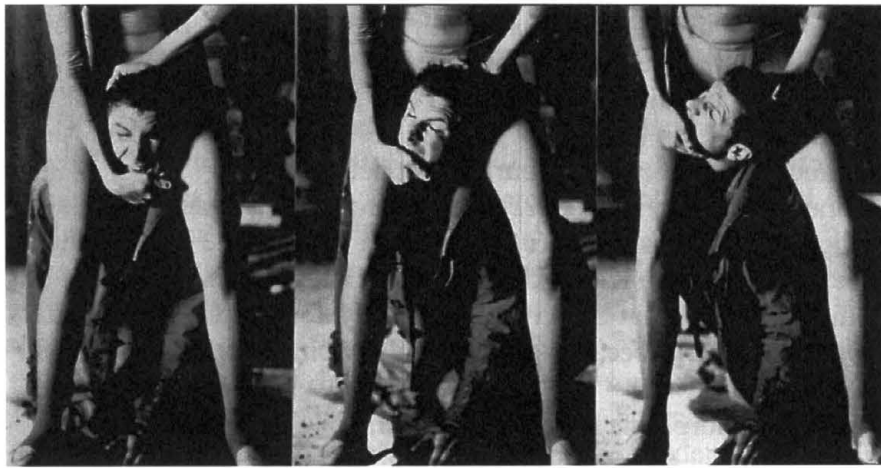


Figure 66. Pris and Decker from *Blade Runner* (1996). Dir. Ridley Scott. Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.

analysis by scholars and the public. Consequently, both film have become cult phenomena that include web-sites, newsgroups, books, magazines, and clubs that focus on these films alone.

In the 1980s, David Cronenberg directed and produced *Videodrome* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), and *Dead Ringers* (1988), three films using the *vagina dentata* to represent the grotesque. In one of the most striking scenes in *Videodrome*, James Woods' Max Renn crawls into his girlfriend's throbbing mouth (Debbie Harry's Nicki Brand), which has inexplicably appeared on his television screen (fig. 67). He had been watching Nicki on the pornographic television programs *Videodrome*, apparently climaxing with a "snuff film" in which she seems to have killed a man. Neither Max nor the film's audience can discern between reality and hallucinations, as Max develops a "Videodrome Brain Tumor" from the undertone on the *Videodrome* tape. The owners of Civic TV encode the tape in order to militarize North America.

Throughout the film, the image of the *vagina dentata* is used repeatedly to represent the devouring nature of a terrorist group. Max hallucinates that his stomach splits apart, and from his imaginary vagina he gives birth to a phallic gun. He envisions that he is raped with encoded videotapes that continue to program his mind until he commits suicide.

Cronenberg, an intriguing yet controversial Canadian director, uses mouth imagery and the *vagina dentata* in other films released in the 1980s—*The Fly* and *Dead Ringers* to explore the question of grotesquery. In *The Fly*, Jeff Goldblum's Seth Brundle, a slightly crazed scientist starts to evolve into a human fly after he tests a genetic transporter machine of his own invention. The machine is designed to instantaneously "beam" living objects over a distance using two telepods shaped like serrated chrysalises—wombs with teeth. (fig. 68). Before being perfected, the machine turns a baboon inside out in the midst of teleportation.



Figure 67. *Videodrome* (1983). Dir. David Cronenberg. Reproduced courtesy of MCA Home Video.

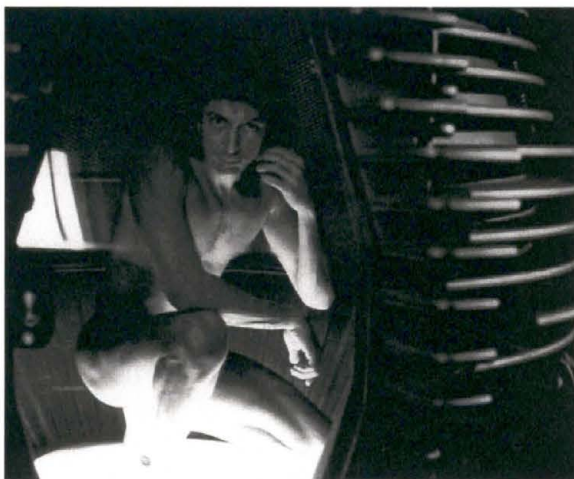


Figure 68. Teleporter from *The Fly*

Seth experiments on himself in a fit of jealousy over his girlfriend, Veronica Quaife (Geena Davis), a reporter for a science magazine. Although his teleportation device is perfected, a fly has found its way into the pod with Seth. In the days after he transports himself, he slowly discovers that he and the fly have melded into one creature.

As he turns into a "Brundelfly," Seth loses many of his body parts. In an unforgettable scene, Seth picks up a bottle that contains his preserved penis and testicles that have dropped from his body as part of his rebirth process. Later, Veronica discovers that she is pregnant, but does not know if conception occurred before or after Seth's transformation. She dreams that she undergoes an abortion in which a long, slimy maggot baby is removed from her womb.

Before she can get an abortion, Seth forces Veronica to go to his laboratory because he has a demented notion that he can improve his condition by merging his molecules with hers. Stathis Borans (John Getz), Veronica's former lover and editor, comes to her rescue, but he is also symbolically castrated by his association with her when his hand and foot are dissolved by Seth's acidic vomit.

Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* is a gynecological thriller in which Geneviève Bujold's Claire Niveau has three openings in her uterus. She becomes an object of intense interest between Jeremy Irons' Beverly and Elliot Mantle (twin gynecologists) who treat her for infertility, become her lovers, and create grotesque specula—especially for her condition. Again, the heroine seems tied to the destruction of the protagonists as she leads the weaker twin, Beverly, into a world of drugs and sado-masochistic sex.

Cronenberg's most recent release, *Crash*, tells the story of a group of people who receive sexual gratification by participating in car crashes. In a striking scene James Spader's James Ballard (the name of the novel's author) has sex with

Gabrielle's (Rosanna Arquette) pudenda-shaped scar that she proudly displays on her thigh.

Cronenberg's films of the 1980s tended to fixate on human illness. It was a time in which many people became obsessed with health and fitness, as the AIDS epidemic spread into the heterosexual community. Hence, these illnesses reflected male anxiety about promiscuous sexual intercourse that was transferred onto all potential sexual partners—including women. In *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, and *Dead Ringers* female sexuality is made to be either dangerous or grotesque.

In response to Cronenberg's misogynistic films, married filmmakers Jim Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd wrote, directed, and produced *The Terminator* (1984), featuring Linda Hamilton in a feminine hero myth in which her character, Sarah Connor, morphs from ditsy waitress to a Madonna figure to Feminazi. Her unborn son, John Connor—*initials J.C.*—becomes a post-apocalyptic savior of "emaculate conception" as implied by a matrilineal name that does not acknowledge the father. (Also, as a reverse reference, the father—not the mother—had not previously experienced sex.)

The Terminator's opening credits are set against a backdrop of futuristic robots and heavy metal equipment crushing a large field scattered with multitudes of human skeletal remains. From this post-apocalyptic hell on earth come two time-travelers—one human and one cyborg. They are both dropped nude, crouched in a fetal position, from the future. The juxtaposition of the birth image to the crushing machines implies a mechanical birth through a *vagina dentata*. The time-travel machine causes the human body to suffer (fig. 69), while the mechanical cyborg terminator glides painlessly down the technological mother's birth canal (fig. 70).

Screenwriter/producer Gale Anne Hurd's feminist version of Joseph Campbell's hero myth features Sarah Connor as the hero. She creates a "sexual union" (Campbell 246) with Kyle Reese, a father-god from the future who "atones"



Figure 69. Time-traveling Terminator from *The Terminator*



Figure 70. Time-traveling Kyle Reese from *The Terminator*

(246) for her when he tells her that in the future she is responsible for saving the remnants of humanity after a technological apocalypse. Sarah learns to be a warrior to fight the terminator, "a shadow presence that guards the passage" and "restores the world" (Campbell 246) when in the sequel she leads her son, together with a "good" terminator, to join forces against corporate evil and save the world from apocalyptic doom.

A box office success, *Terminator* was produced at a cost of \$6.4 million and it went on to gross \$36.9 million at the box-office plus millions more in video sales and rentals, a success which helped fund future Cameron-Hurd collaborations *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, and *Terminator 2* (1991) with much larger budgets for special effects.

Aliens, a Hurd-Cameron sequel to the Ridley Scott classic, changes the theme from good mother versus bad alien to a vehicle which asserts that both Ripley and the alien are multidimensional mothers who justifiably fight for the survival of their offspring. The story begins fifty-seven years after the end of Scott's *Alien* tale, when Ripley's ship is rescued after decades of being lost in space. The rescue team immediately enlists her as an expert to look for survivors at a space colony that has been ravaged by aliens. The team finds only two, a girl-child called Newt who become a daughter-figure for Ripley and a woman who begs for death because she is an incubator for an alien. Instead of the monstrous male birth of Scott's *Alien*, this film's monstrous birth comes from a woman's belly.

Unlike Ridley Scott's *phallus dentatus*, the Cameron-Hurd Alien Queen is a beautiful, colorful pudenda-shaped flower that in no way resembles the metallic gray, gooey images from the original film. Perhaps this change is a result of having a female producer and art director although the creation of the Alien Queen's appearance is credited to Jim Cameron.

Another possible result of having more women in powerful positions on the set is that the alien is a more sympathetic monster, who is driven not by malice or greed, but to save her own children, whom Ripley's team is intent on killing. The alien first attempts to kill Newt, adding to a hostility toward the alien that began when Ripley first lost her entire crew to this vicious enemy. Despite Ripley's animosity toward the alien, it does not kill her when given an opportunity, a choice that makes the alien even more sympathetic.

The imagery throughout *Aliens* has a more female focus and point of view than had the previous film. In the Hurd-Cameron production, there is no doubting that Ripley is the hero and leader. The film was well-received by critics and audiences alike, who seemed to enjoy watching a battle between two strong females, albeit one human, the other alien.

Also produced by Gale Ann Hurd, Graham Baker's *Alien Nation* (1988) reverses standard birth imagery to create separate, yet familiar, symbolism for the alien "newcomers." Newcomers, referred to less politely as "slags," become intoxicated on sour milk or laundry detergent and are destroyed when they come in contact with sea water, all of which have feminine connotations. However, in *Alien Nation* these images become monstrous when the film takes race and gender relations and turns them on their ear.

When the protagonist cop (James Caan's Matthew Sykes) questions a female Newcomer, an exotic dancer in the tradition of Josephine Baker, she wants to know if Sykes (James Caan) has ever had sex with a newcomer. When he answers that he has not, she calls him a virgin, which makes him more exciting to her. The exotic dancer accuses Sykes of fearing sexual intercourse with her, but what he really fears is the possibility of his own sexual inadequacies, because in an earlier scene, Sykes shows "George" (Mandy Patinkin) his new partner and newcomer, a condom and explains its use, George replies, "That fits?"

Sykes is a divorced father, whose ex-wife has married a successful businessman who is able to provide the wedding for Sykes' daughter that Sykes could not afford himself. Sykes and other men in the film discuss feeling intellectually inadequate when the newcomers are able to learn English in three months, while no earthlings in the film speak the aliens' language. *Alien Nation* implies that the feminine is more powerful than the masculine by using powerful feminine imagery to depict male sexual and intellectual inadequacy.

The last Hurd-Cameron collaboration, *The Abyss* (1989), also depicts a strong woman and powerful, beautiful birth imagery; however, the tone of the film seems to be tainted by the couple's ongoing separation and divorce. As a matter of fact, the on-screen couple Virgil "Bud" and Lindsay, played by Ed Harris and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, are separated and considering a divorce when they are forced together to disarm a downed nuclear submarine that Lindsay engineered with a diving crew led by Bud. When she arrives after a scene in which a circular window releases water in a birth image that metaphorically announces her arrival to advise the crew about the intricacies of the vessel, she is called the "Queen Bitch of the Universe," which seems to pay homage to the Queen alien in the couple's previous film.

Like the Alien, Lindsay becomes a more sympathetic character through the course of the film. At first, she barks orders and angers her estranged husband; however, it is soon apparent to all involved that this strong woman knows what she is doing. Later she becomes a hero by endangering her own life to save Bud's when they are stranded without enough oxygen for both of them to swim across 400 feet of icy water. In a touching scene, she submits to drown in Bud's arms while he drags her lifeless body to the submarine that has the equipment to rescue.

Birth, sex, and death, three primal concerns of humanity, are explored though out the film through verbal, visual, and technological metaphors. The divers

are attached to the rescue sub with ropes that become umbilical life lines which occasionally break, potentially causing a watery death. After Lindsay's death and rebirth, Bud also temporarily sacrifices his life after he agrees to become a fetus in a womb of embryonic fluid serving as liquid oxygen to make a final dive in order to disconnect the nuclear bomb on the submarine resting on the ocean floor. After an emotional good-bye to his "wife," he is rescued by friendly aliens that offer him breathing room and deliver him to the arms of his wife for a reconciliation.

However, after their real-life separation Cameron and Hurd did not reconcile. *The Abyss* was their last collaborative film. Cameron's post-Hurd career has been more successful than hers, and he discontinued his use of birth imagery. For example, in *Titanic*, his Academy Award-winning disaster film, one sees very few such images, despite the possibilities. In contrast, Hurd's marginally successful horror flick *The Relic* incorporates myriad vaginal images to depict a ghost in a museum exhibit.

Vaginal imagery is certainly not limited to projects in which women have creative control. Mouth and vaginal images appear in Steven Spielberg's multimillion-dollar-success, *Jurassic Park* (1993), including the cloned, female-only dinosaurs (fig. 71) that rip people apart, like the lions in the Roman Colosseum (fig. 20). Later in the film, some of the female dinosaurs experience a sex change without surgery and procreate with females who then wreak havoc on humans to protect their young. Therefore, the subtext asserts that Mother Nature, in this case female dinosaurs, will rage against cloning, a concern that made headlines in 1998.



Figure 71. Dinosaur mouth from *Jurassic Park* (1996). Dir. Steven Spielberg. Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM: THE 1990s

In the late 1990s, distributors of science fiction films began to release their products throughout the world. Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys* was released in twenty-two countries, including Israel, Hong Kong, and Japan. Roland Emmerich's major blockbuster *Independence Day* enjoyed an even broader release in over sixty countries including Turkey, Slovakia, and Lithuania. Furthermore, *Gattaca* (1997), *The X-Files Movie* (1998), and *Deep Impact* (1998) were released in well over twenty countries each. In order for these films to have success in non-English speaking countries, their semiotics must appeal on a broad scale.

Therefore, Terry Gilliam acts on long-standing artistic tradition by using images of rebirth to represent the afterlife in *Twelve Monkeys* (1996). The ubiquity of these images in art and film, along with the fact that *Twelve Monkeys* and other science fiction films continue to have worldwide success, supports Carl Jung's belief in universal human symbols.

Twelve Monkeys contains maternal archetypes and feminine sexual imagery the are used to visually portray cinematic time travel. Gilliam's comments, featured on the MCA Universal Signature Collection laser disc version of the film, reveal that he deliberately chose rebirth imagery—visual metaphors of death and the afterlife—to bridge the various eras depicted in the film. For example, he calls the time-machine a "chrysalis" and speaks of using lights at the end of vaginal tunnels as chronological borders between our heavenly present and the film's hellish future.

Within the film's thematic framework, bureaucratic astrophysicists of the future propel James Cole (Bruce Willis) back to the 1990s. Starting with the birth image of the chrysalis, Gilliam invites viewers to consider their own contemporary world a utopia because we have cars, landscapes, fresh air, and Louis Armstrong's

What a Wonderful World. In contrast, when Cole travels back to his own hellish, dystopian future—a concentration camp with cages, foul air, and cruel scientists—he passes through a frightening birth image of the *vagina dentata*.

The women in Cole's life reflect this dichotomy brilliantly. Madeleine Stowe's Kathryn Raily, a Madonna archetype of the good mother, becomes Cole's asexual love-interest in the 1990s and is associated with the positive image of the chrysalis. In Cole's harsh future, Carol Florence's bureaucratic old crone, the archetypal bad mother, relentlessly interrogates him and is connected with the *vagina dentata*.

In this tribute to Chris Marker's 1962 classic short, *La Jetée*, the future, like that of the Terminator, is dystopic. In both *La Jetée* and *Twelve Monkeys* people are forced into an underground womb. Instead of the nuclear disaster depicted in *La Jetée*, which reflects the anxieties of post-World War II Europe, the dystopia of *Twelve Monkeys* is caused by a virus threatening anyone who goes above ground. When Cole is sent above ground to collect living samples for scientists to analyze to find a cure for the virus, the camera tracks him walking through vaginal passageways wearing a full-body condom (fig. 72). This image may be interpreted as a metaphor for anxieties with regard to the AIDS virus. He emerges through a manhole onto the sterile, snow-covered wasteland that was once Philadelphia (fig. 73), where he encounters bears and lions with toothy, roaring mouths. These images resemble the *vagina dentata* and they seem to serve as a metaphor for the apocalypse. Instead of sunshine and people, the icy conditions and the dangerous animals that inhabit post-apocalyptic Philadelphia alert the viewer that the world is no longer a fertile breeding ground for humanity.

Terry Gilliam combines the line "*Se réveiller dans un autre temps, c'était naître une seconde fois, adult*" (To be born again as an adult, the shock would be too great) with *Terminator's* birth imagery in a paradigm of cinematic time travel that

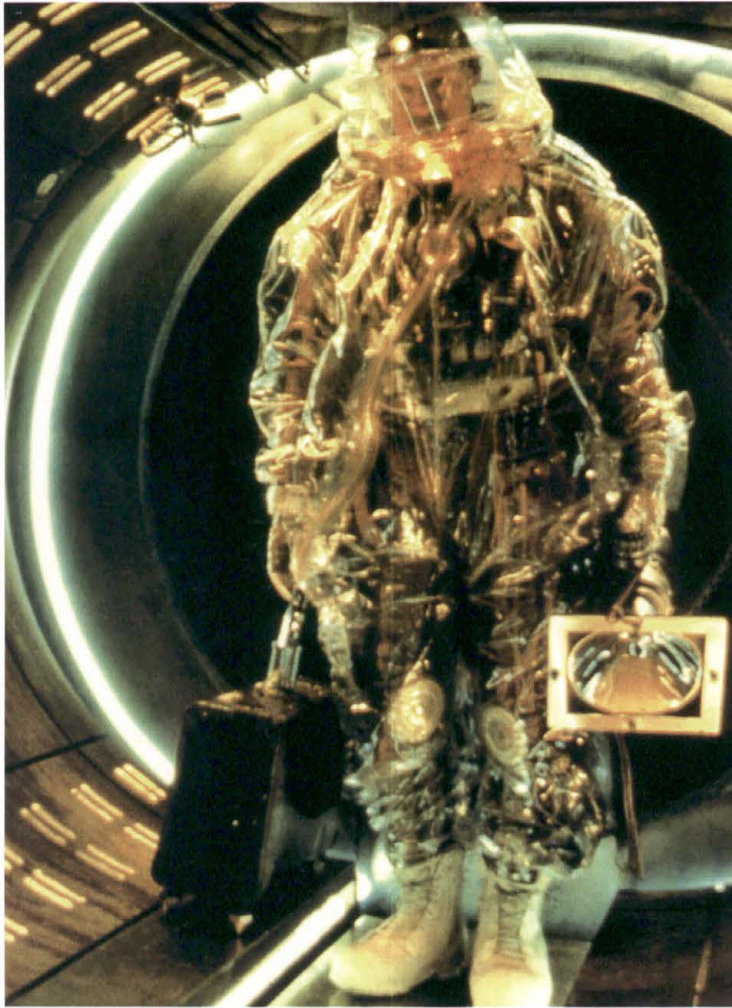


Figure 72. James Cole's body condom from *Twelve Monkeys*



Figure 73. Icy birth from *Twelve Monkeys*

requires the subject to be nude. James Cole not only arrives naked, but he is also covered with blood and goo, ostensibly because he was fighting violently and was subsequently drugged with thorazine, a drug for schizophrenia that induces lethargy in the patient if administered in large doses. The image makes Cole appear as a newborn fetus (fig. 74). Psychiatrist Kathryn Raily (Madeleine Stowe) is assigned Cole's case. When the dystopian scientists discover that he arrived in 1990 instead of 1996, he is whisked back to dystopia. Raily's boss insinuates that he must have escaped through an air duct, which is featured in a zoom shot of a circular opening, looking like the teeth of a *vagina dentata* (fig. 75).

In the next scene, the time machine is revealed for the first time when Cole travels back to the past for the second time. It has the wombic appearance of a cocoon (fig. 76). As a matter of fact, the film crew called it a "chrysalis" during production. Cole is placed in this device, which shoots him out through a lighted hole in a dome-shaped building. The image simulates a birth canal with the light at the end of a tunnel that so many survivors of near-death experiences have described.

The juxtaposed pattern of negative and positive vaginal images appears throughout the film to depict time travel. When Cole travels to the dystopian future, it is through the *vagina dentata* and when he travels to what he considers a utopian past, he is placed in the beautiful chrysalis womb and birthed into light. The light-at-the-end-of-a-tunnel image has become paradigmatic for filmic depiction of time travel. Other examples of this visual metaphor include Nicholas Meyer's time-travel sequence in *Time After Time* (1979) (fig. 78), the rabbit hole in time from Terry Gilliam's *Time Bandits* (1981), the off-screen technological birth canal of Jim Cameron's *Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator 2* (1991), and Peter Hyams' *Timecop* (1994) (fig. 79).



Figure 74. Cole as fetus from *Twelve Monkeys*



Figure 75. Airduct from *Twelve Monkeys*

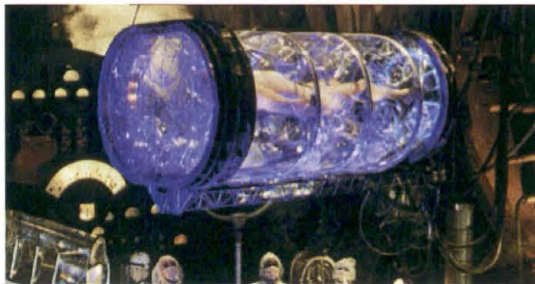


Figure 76. The chrysalis from *Twelve Monkeys*



Figure 77. Light at the End of the Tunnel from *Twelve Monkeys*

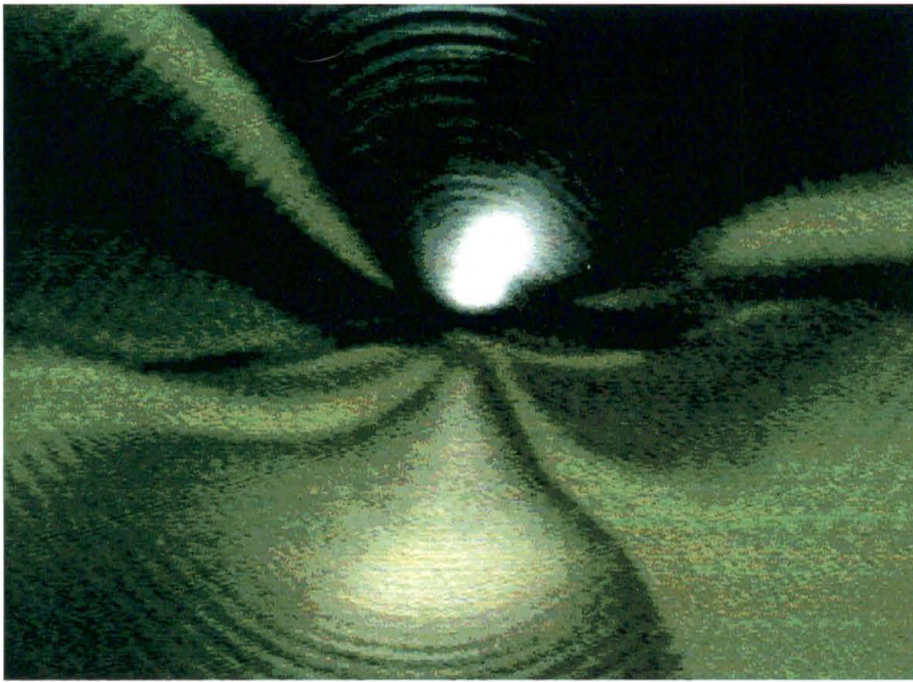


Figure 78. Time-traveling from *Time After Time*



Figure 79. Time-travel from *Timecop*

Most people respond passionately to vaginal imagery for a variety of different reasons. Psychoanalyst Otto Rank argues in *The Trauma of Birth* that the vagina serves the individual with its pleasure function and the species with propagation (15). He writes that all humans are strongly affected by our time in the womb (12), that sleep represents a nightly return (12), sexual intercourse offers a partial return (39), that the real sin of the Cross was that Christ could not die in the fetal position (138), and that the Edenic myth represents expulsion from the womb (113). Sigmund Freud argues that neurotic men fantasize that the vagina is an uncanny, castrating image (Strachey 17: 245). Female psychoanalyst Karen Horney maintains that men are envious of women's ability to give birth (115), while Simone de Beauvoir sees the vagina dark and mysterious for men and women alike (386).

This sense of mystery can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when midwives were burned as witches, a movement that resulted in male doctors intervening in the birthing process. Consequently, women's power met with a sharp decline. In early modern society, birth became hidden from civilized men and women through seclusion and chloroform. Most people did not see the birth of animals or humans unless they were doctors or farmers. In recent years, that seclusion model has changed. From the late 1950s, women began to have natural childbirth in which they took back the power over their own bodies. During this time, more and more men witnessed the birth of their own children. More recently, many couples have opted to videotape their children's birth, a practice which has resulted in childbirth becoming a family affair and media event. Of course, everyone was once incubated in wombs and born from darkness into light, and most people desire sexual fulfillment. Therefore, the female genital images that signal power, desire, and regeneration mean something important at all times, to all humans, regardless of gender.

Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) may appear to be a politically-correct, action-packed thriller, but it really reflects the Christian-Right's anxiety regarding female sexuality and women's desire to control their own destinies through financial independence, birth control, and abortion. On the surface, *Independence Day* seems to present strong women holding powerful positions or saving the world. However, structural and semiotic analysis of the archetypal female sexual images and anti-feminist subtextual messages reveals that the film reinforces patriarchal myths concerning women's power and sexuality.

In her debut, the aliens' mothership gives birth to smaller ships that resemble huge *vagina dentata* hovering above all of the world's major cities. Washington D.C.'s huge phallic skyscrapers, shot from an extremely low angle, appear erect and ready to rape the huge vaginal spacecraft (fig. 80). However, the symbolic rape does not occur with the smaller phallic weapons. In fact, the viewer sees the daughters of the mothership destroy these phallic monuments (fig. 81). As a matter of fact, many audiences have cheered when the White House explodes (fig. 82), a response that is obviously critical of both the real and fictional Democratic presidents—Clinton and *ID4*'s Whitmore (Bill Pullman). In the end, the men of Earth conquer the aliens when phallic nuclear weapons symbolically rape the daughter-ships' *vagina dentatas*. However, this can only occur after disarming their diaphragm force-fields.

Along with the destruction of the mothership and her daughters, the human women are also demonized, marginalized, and eventually eliminated. For example, when Margaret Colen's Constance Spano, the president's press secretary, refuses to listen to her estranged husband about the countdown leading to inevitable attack, she causes the death of millions of people. Only after she and her husband reconcile is she able to become a savior by insisting on giving alien attack victims refuge on a military base. When Mary McDonnell's Marilyn



Figure 80. *Independence Day* (1996). Dir. Roland Emmerich; Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.

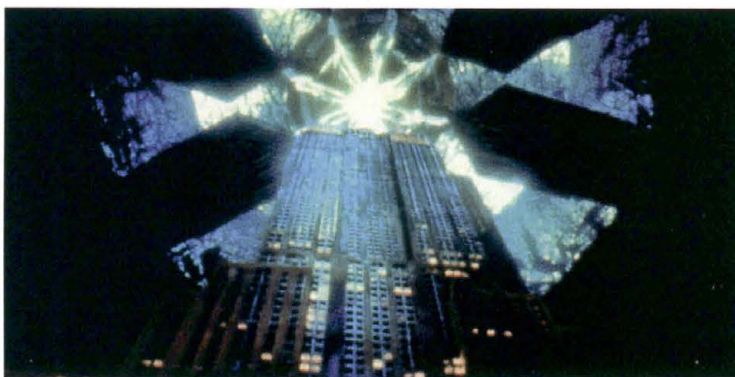


Figure 81. *Independence Day* (1996). Dir. Roland Emmerich; Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.



Figure 82. *Independence Day* (1996). Dir. Roland Emmerich;
Reproduced courtesy of Fox Home Video.

Whitmore, the First Lady, first refuses to obey her husband and at one point pushes her daughter away, she is punished by death with little show of grief on the part of her husband or her daughter. Vivica Fox's Jasmine Dubrow—the new Eve—rescues others after she conforms to her man's wishes the day the aliens arrive.

Independence Day was extremely successful internationally. The film grossed over \$50 million during its opening weekend and over \$700 million as of January 1997, winning the Oscar for best visual effects. The film's director, Roland Emmerich, born and raised in Germany, pictures America through the lens of an awestruck tourist and American audiences devoured his excessive patriotism.

None of the women save the earth. In fact, not one of the jet pilots is a woman. Unlike its predecessor *Star Wars*, *Independence Day* has no Princess Leah leading the rebels to victory, only a couple of conformist cheerleaders who jump into the arms of their big, strong men—the ones who have saved the earth. *Independence Day* reveals a resurgence of the right-wing attitude toward women: Stand by your man and shut up.

However, the war for women's rights is not over. As a matter of fact, as we approach the end of the millenium, women have attained considerable power through the use of computerized technology. In the past, it was felt that "the bigger the better" as far as machines were concerned. Now, on the other hand, new technology has become smaller and smaller—more feminized, and easier for women to use. Also, women's studies have become an important academic field of study, and women increasingly make films in all genres.

As we approach the new millenium, women have earned important positions in industry and government. In 1998, two science fiction films were released that feature fathers who prove their strength to their daughters. Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact* and Michael Bay's *Armageddon* both feature fathers who sacrifice their lives so that their daughters may live. This strength is represented by huge, high-

powered drills—*phallus dentatas*—that split apart the asteroid that is about to crash into earth, destroying life as we know it.. Such an uncontrollable celestial body represents the fear that time is running out on Mother Earth's biological clock. Instead of a male-induced catastrophe such as a nuclear holocaust, this is a natural (feminine) disaster and only a phallus with teeth can fight this powerful foe.

In reality, divorced fathers oftentimes are cut out of their children's lives. They are limited as to how much time they can spend with their children, and many give up on having a meaningful relationships with them. In the eyes of the law, the mother's relationship with her children takes priority over the father's. These films with their loving but erring fathers, and their powerful phallic tools provide an outlet for fathers who fantasize about obtaining the redemption they feel they need from their children.

Birth and sexual imagery can be used to discern the fears and anxieties about the cultures that both produces and enjoys certain aspects of those symbols. Approaching the new millennium, our world is in a state of flux partly because of the vast amount of information available via internet, television, and the print media. Since the 1950s, the prolific spread of information has been a major factor in women obtaining more equal rights. Filmmakers have created visual metaphors for this gender shift, sexual imagery that can be found in science fiction film. Most recently, these films have featured strong women with men even more powerful than themselves. The films combine strong characterization with prolific sexual imagery, a composite that illustrates various fantasies of modern audiences, just as visual art has done for the past two millennia.

The present study, although extensive, does not cover fully all aspects of sexual imagery and its affects on societies that produces those artistic expressions. Directions for future research could include analyzing other science fiction films as well as other genres. Also, more extensive research into contemporary cultural

criticism and film reviews could also be useful, but beyond the scope of this present work.

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