The Goddess, the Witch and the Bitch: 
three studies in the perception of women

By Nicola Tracy Hare

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Supervisor: Ms M. West
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Abstract

In the minds of many people all over the world, women are ‘second class citizens’, standing accused of the downfall of mankind ever since Eve allegedly ate the apple. Even amongst those who do not openly denigrate women, there are many who do so in other, more subtle ways even if they are unaware of it. This study proposes to challenge such a view of women by exposing the ways in which perceptions of women are constructed by society, which frequently wants to maintain the status quo of male dominance. This study employs a feminist approach in examining this gynocentric theme, along with cultural studies which, with its focus on power relations and ways of decentring power structures, is also clearly of use. In addition, this multidisciplinary approach of cultural studies offers the possibility of studying literary texts as well as popular culture.

Three specific time periods are examined, with a view to uncovering negative perceptions of women and ways that women can resist such attempts to control them. In chapter one, the focus turns to contemporary perceptions of prehistoric women and the ways that so-called ‘objective’ science has failed to represent women accurately. Similarly, ‘objective’ accounts of Goddess-worship – which frequently fail to examine this phenomenon adequately – are revisited. Alice Walker’s The Temple of My Familiar (1989) is discussed as a text which acts as a site of resistance to societally-informed perceptions.

Chapter two continues this investigation by turning to the concept of the witch and its maligned association with women. Woman and witchcraft, having been associated for centuries, are investigated as a pairing which frequently results because
of attempts to control women by androcentric society. In such situations, the practising of witchcraft can actually become a form of resistance to patriarchy. The pernicious effect of society’s need to purge itself – by witch hunts – of witches is also investigated. *The Devil’s Chimney* (1997) by Anne Landsman and “The prophetess” (1994) by Njabulo S. Ndebele are discussed as texts which examine fictionalised South African versions of this phenomenon.

Sinead O’Connor, the Irish singer, is the ‘bitch’ discussed in chapter three. She is examined as a woman who offers strong and on-going resistance to patriarchal ways of thinking which would ‘box’ women in. This singer refuses to accept societal roles which are offered to women and so offers means of resistance to patriarchy, many of which are discussed in this chapter.

This study concludes that it is the responsibility of women to resist patriarchy and to define roles for themselves. The three chapters examine various means of resistance and offer women insight into the forms of opposition they themselves can take.
Opsomming

Soos baie mense regoor die wêreld dit sien, is vroue tweederangse burgers, verantwoordelik vir die val van die mensdom sedert Eva na bewering die appel geëet het. Selfs onder diegene wat vroue nie openlik swartsmeer nie, is daar baie wat dit op ander, meer subtiele maniere of selfs onbewustelik doen. Hierdie studie wil so 'n siening van vroue beveg deur die wyses bloot te lê waarop persepsies van vroue gekonstrueer word deur 'n samelewing wat dikkwels die status quo van manlike dominansie in stand wil hou. Die studie maak gebruik van 'n feministiese benadering in die ondersoek na hierdie ginosentriese tema, tesame met Kultuurstudie (Cultural Studies). Laasgenoemde studiebenadering is onmiskenbaar van waarde vanweë die fokus daarvan op magsverhoudinge en die wyses waarop magstrukture afgebreek word. Verder bied die multidissiplinêre benadering van Kultuurstudie moontlikhede vir die bestudering van sowel literêre tekste as populêre kultuur.

Drie spesifieke periodes word ondersoek, met die oog daarop om negatiewe persepsies van vroue bloot te lê en maniere aan die hand te doen waarop vroue kan weerstand bied teen sodanige pogings om hulle te beheer. In die eerste hoofstuk is die fokus op hedendaagse persepsies van prehistoriese vroue en die wyse waarop die sogenaamde 'objektiewe' wetenskap gefaal het om vroue akkuraat te representeer. Eweneens word daar gekeyk na 'objektiewe' weergawes van godin-verering wat dikwels nie daarin slaag om hierdie fenomeen bevredigend te analiseer nie. Alice Walker se The Temple of My Familiar (1989) word bespreek as 'n teks wat dan as 'n standpuntinname van verset teen sosiaal gevormde persepsies.
In hoofstuk twee word die ondersoek voortgesit en verskuif die fokus na die konsep van die heks en die verderflike assosiasies daarvan met vroue. Die eeue-oue assosiasie tussen vroue en heksery word bespreek as 'n verbintenis wat meermale spruit uit die pogings van 'n androsentriese samelewing om vroue to beheer. In so 'n situasie ken die beoefening van heksery in der waarheid 'n vorm van verset teen patriargie word. Die skadelike uitwerking van die samelewing se behoefte om sigself te reinig deur middel van heksejagtery word ook geanaliseer. *The Devil's Chimney* (1997) van Anne Landsman en "The prophetess" (1994) van Njabulo S. Ndebele word bespreek as fiktiewe Suid Afrikaanse weergawes van hierdie verskynsel.

Sinead O'Connor, die lerse sanger, is die ‘teef' wet in hoofstuk drie bespreek word. Sy word geanaliseer as 'n vrou wat sterk en voortdurend weerstand bied teen die patriargale denkraamwerk wet vroue inperk. Hierdie sanger weier om die rolle te aanvaar wat die samelewing aan vroue bied en verset haar op hierdie wyse teen die patriargale stelsel. Baie van haar stategieë word bespreek in hierdie hoofstuk.

In die studie word daar tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat dit die verantwoordelikheid van vroue is om weerstand te bied teen patriargie en rolle vir hulself te definieer. Die drie hoofstukke verken verskeie wyses van versetpleging en bied aan vroue insig in die vorme van teenstand wet hulself kan bied.
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Blessed be.
Introduction

For centuries, women have been oppressed by the weighty rule of patriarchy, so much so that many consider dominance by men to be 'natural' and even divinely ordained. There are, however, suggestions that this situation has not always prevailed and that the androcentrism of most societies has been constructed in the minds of people. This study will examine some aspects of the past and present of women’s experiences which may, at first glance, seem disparate but which illustrate the extent to which women have been defined by and in relation to men. From the role of prehistoric women in their societies to Medieval witch burning and the antics of a contemporary singer, this study proposes to uncover ways in which women are perceived by society and often constrained by this act of perception which frequently labels them as inferior to men.

This paper employs feminist thinking and arguments in examining the means by which women and men are perceived. The broad field of feminism is thus a helpful way in which to approach the above-mentioned issues because it focuses on the marginalisation of women. It is not, however, an entirely unproblematic approach since feminism is believed by some to be somewhat partial in its worldview, favouring the outlook of white, heterosexual, middle class, Western women¹. This realisation has led to a plethora of writing which can be seen as feminist in its general gynocentrism, but which also pays attention to those factors which additionally marginalise women who

¹ Feminists of colour like Patricia Hill Collins, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks and Alice Walker – to name a few – are amongst the better known critics who have espoused this view and have challenged the hegemonic thinking found in much traditional feminism.
are, for example, of colour, lesbian or working class. Therefore, as Wilfred L. Guerin et al. note in A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, it is, perhaps, more appropriate to refer to feminist approaches rather than the feminist approach (1992:182).

Another area of study – cultural studies – is also of use in this thesis. Like feminism, cultural studies is concerned with power relations, but is less constrained in terms of its focus, tending to draw not only from so-called high culture like canonical literature, but also from everyday, ‘low’ culture. In his “Introduction” to The Cultural Studies Reader (1993), Simon During identifies key features of this field of study, and suggests that “cultural studies is not an academic discipline quite like others. It possesses neither a well-defined methodology nor clearly demarcated fields for investigation. [It] … is, of course, the study of culture, or, more particularly, the study of contemporary culture” (1). By incorporating some of the techniques drawn from cultural studies, this thesis proposes to pull together various aspects of modern society including studies like feminist theology, literary theory, anthropology, history, psychology and the MTV world of rock stars. Academic scholarship has traditionally been a male-dominated field, and its categories and disciplines are therefore male constructs. By ignoring traditional distinctions between the ‘high’ culture of academia and the ‘low’ culture of everyday life, cultural studies allows an interdisciplinary approach which thus breaks down such boundaries.

During also sees the focus of cultural studies as being on “subjectivity” – “culture in relation to individual lives” – rather than on so-called scientific ‘objectivity’ (1993:1). This challenge to scientific positivism comes into play in chapter one where ‘objective’ studies of the societal roles of prehistoric women are questioned. Furthermore, During
notes that cultural studies focuses on relationships of power between people, and between people and institutions, indicating that “it work[s] in the interests of those who have the fewest resources” (2). As he writes, “[c]ultural studies insists one cannot just ignore – or accept – division and struggle” (2). Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon’s *Introducing Cultural Studies* (1997) reinforces During’s assertion, suggesting that “[c]ultural studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power. Its constant goal is to expose power relationships and examine how these relationships influence and shape cultural practices” (9).

Toril Moi, in her chapter “Feminist Literary Criticism” in *Modern Literary Theory* (1986), would agree that cultural studies can be appropriated by feminists, arguing as she does that

feminists … find themselves in a position roughly similar to that of other radical critics: speaking from their marginalised positions on the outskirts of the academic establishment, they strive to make explicit the politics of the so-called ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ works of their colleagues, as well as to act as cultural critics in the widest sense of the word …. [F]eminists can in a sense afford to be tolerantly pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories, precisely because any approach that can be successfully appropriated to their political ends must be welcome (205).

*Imagining Women* (1992), edited by Frances Bonner *et al*, is a collection of essays in which the interests of feminism and of cultural studies interlink. The introduction to this study indicates that an important consideration should be “cultural representation”, suggesting that the focus of this issue looks at “how women are represented, how we represent ourselves, and what we do with the representations we encounter” (1). Furthermore, the focus of the essays in this collection is clearly not only “that known as high culture, but a much wider field which [looks] at everyday life” (1), revealing a willingness to engage with women’s lived experiences. Elspeth Probyn’s *Sexing the
Self (1993) is another text which considers the intersection between cultural studies and feminism. In defining cultural studies, Probyn employs Lawrence Grossberg’s definition:

Cultural studies is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways discourses are produced within, inserted into and operate in the relations between people’s everyday lives and the structures of the social formation so as to reproduce, resist and transform the existing structures of power (quoted in Probyn:2).

This study, then, proposes to offer a gynocentric approach to a variety of texts, and to demonstrate that patriarchal thinking constrains the way(s) in which people think about women, their abilities and their roles in society. It will employ a feminist approach, informed by cultural studies, which will allow a focus on both gender issues specifically and power relations in general and will thus contain a particular focus on women’s resistance to patriarchal thinking.

Sardar and Van Loon emphasize the fact that cultural studies, with its interest in the representation of people, is concerned with the concept of the ‘other’, “the darker side, the binary opposite of oneself” (1997:13). In the confines of this thesis, the focus will primarily be on the man/woman binary opposition, where ‘woman’ constitutes the denigrated ‘other’. An attempt will be made to rescue woman from her designated role as ‘other’ by investigating how women have been marginalised in three different time periods and uncovering the androcentric thinking which has placed women in this role.

Chapter one focuses on prehistoric women and the way(s) in which contemporary ‘scientific’ studies have created a view of the past that does not reflect the abilities of women and are even sometimes downright misogynist. Similarly, the question of whether Goddess-worship occurred in such times is investigated, with attention paid to the attempts by god-oriented religions to either deny or denigrate such claims. That patriarchy, which has dominated ‘scientific’ disciplines like anthropology
and archaeology, has largely ignored the contributions of prehistoric women will be demonstrated. Feminist texts like Merlin Stone’s *When God Was A Woman* (1975) and Evelyn Reed’s *Woman’s Evolution* (1975), both of which challenge androcentrism, are discussed as texts which offer alternative ways of seeing the roles of prehistoric women. Alice Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) is discussed as a novel which foregrounds the concerns raised in this chapter.

Chapter two highlights the phenomenon of the witch as a manifestation of the role of ‘other’ for women and the ways the accusation of witchcraft has acted as a form of social control over women. The strong link between women and witchcraft is highlighted, as well as the on-going phenomenon of witch hunts in South Africa today. Fictional representations of witches, as are found in Anne Landsman’s *The Devil’s Chimney* (1997) and Njabulo S. Ndebele’s “The prophetess” (1994), are also discussed as South African manifestations of witches.

In chapter three, the focus shifts to the study of a contemporary artist who embodies many of the concerns raised in chapters one and two. Sinéad O’Connor is examined as a woman who has, in numerous ways, challenged the patriarchal thought which is so prevalent in modern society. She has offered challenge to authority of all kinds, from governments to religious leaders and parents and can be seen to do so by subverting and casting aside the binary oppositions which underpin much Western thought. O’Connor not only offers a continuation of the discussion on the subversion of patriarchy but is also specifically linked to the concerns raised in the previous chapters. Her interest in Goddess-worship and focus on people’s healing, for example, make O’Connor an ideal focus of study in terms of an investigation of a witch-figure.
Each of these chapters offers insight into the damaging ways women have been – and still are – oppressed by patriarchy’s notions of what women should be. Ways of resisting such control are uncovered along with the oppressions themselves.
Chapter 1: The Goddess

A visitor to Earth who was to read certain texts pertaining to the ‘nature’ of women and men might congratulate her/himself on having avoided meeting the lesser, unintelligent woman, while admiring the qualities of fearlessness and fortitude in the male of the species. Men, it is ‘clear’ from such texts, have led women from the primordial soup and have continued to lead the way into civilisation, glorying in their male god along the way. This view is not, fortunately for the reputation of women, unchallenged and this chapter outlines the nature of the challenge and, in doing so, uncovers the mechanisms of patriarchy’s oppression of women. This discussion demonstrates that dominant Western thinking, which has predominantly been patriarchal and Christian-based, is inadequate and fails to address the contributions made by prehistoric women or the issue of pre-Christian religion adequately. Alice Walker’s The Temple of My Familiar (1989) is examined as a text that the above-mentioned visitor should perhaps read for an alternative view of the past of the human race.

Any study which proposes to examine the past faces the problem of interpretation and its associated pitfall, bias. This problem is compounded when the study attempts to turn its focus to the ancient past, because of a relative lack of material available for such a study. Both human interference and natural degradation of materials can result in the destruction of ancient artifacts. What remains is usually fragmentary and one must hazard educated guesses concerning the significance and uses of artifacts. Naturally bias becomes an issue, especially considering that there are often no written records accompanying the material (when it originated in a preliterate
culture) or any available written records are incomplete or damaged by the passage of
time and are often incomprehensible. Anthropology suffers from these maladies. Its
field of study is prehistoric society and its origins (Reed 1978:1) – a study which spans
some two million years – and often has as material extremely ancient artifacts.

Archeological and anthropological studies have been responsible for the almost
standard image of the prehistoric caveman as a hunter who protects his woman while
hunting mammoths. In this view, man is the provider, protector and controller of
woman, whose primary role is that of breeder. This view of mankind has often been
presented as the truth about human origins. Barbara Ehrenreich, in “The Real Truth
About the Female Body” (1999), reinforces this idea: “Museum dioramas of the … past
still tend to feature guys heading out after the mastodons, spears in hand, while the gals
crouch slack-jawed around the campfire, busily lactating” (43). In “Prehistoric
Construction of Mothering” (date not supplied), Kathleen M. Bolen concurs, “[w]oman
today are believed to be unequal, weaker, biologically inferior and evolutionary (sic)
unimportant; under patriarchal, androcentric, and traditional archeological frameworks,
this ideology creates similar women in the past” (3, my emphasis). The majority of
anthropologists and evolutionists have, up until relatively recently, proposed that men
have been intellectually and physically superior to women since humans began to be
distinguishable from apes. Jerry Bergman outlines such evolutionists’ thinking, as well
as some consequences experienced by women and other marginalised groups as a
result of this sexist, supremacist worldview, in his article “The History of Evolution’s
Teaching of Women’s Inferiority” (1996). He writes that Charles Darwin, the
quintessential evolutionary theorist, “taught that women were biologically and
intellectually inferior to men” (1) because of the competition which occurs between
males of a species for mates. Bergman expands on this theory: “a male must prove himself physically and intellectually superior to other men in the competition for females, whereas a woman must only be superior in sexual attraction” (4). According to Bergman, the consequences of such thinking were immense and did not only apply to women. Evolution ‘taught’ that men were superior to women and certain races or nations were superior to others. This ‘us-them’ dichotomy justified the exploitation of the weaker sex, race or nation (7). Helen Fisher asserts,

> Europeans were spreading out to Africa, Asia, and America, gobbling up land, subduing the natives and even massacring them. But any guilt they harbored now vanished .... [because of such evolutionist thinking]. Not only racial, class, and national differences, but every single human emotion was the adaptive end product of evolution, selection, and survival of the fittest (quoted in Bergman:13).

There are, however, those who have critically examined such androcentric viewpoints and who have offered other interpretations of the emergence of the human race. One such critic is Evelyn Reed, whose *Woman’s Evolution from Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family* (1975) is a comprehensive presentation of the emergence of the human race from animality through various stages of evolution to modern society. Reed has stated quite explicitly that her text “deals with the hidden history of women [and] is a feminist book” (1978:1). She has taken, as the basis of her hypothesis, archeological and anthropological data on human societies – both past and present – which belong to the epochs of “savagery” and “barbarism”. She defines the former as being “based on hunting and food gathering” and the latter as being linked to “food production through agriculture and stock-raising” (xiv). Even though such terms have, in contemporary, politically correct times, become distasteful as they appear to denigrate so-called ‘savages’ or ‘primitive’ people, Reed defends their use by asserting that in her text they are not “used in a derogatory, colonialist, or racist sense [but] … are … used exclusively
in a scientific way” (xviii). Therefore, although contemporary debates challenge ‘scientific’ discourse as inherently racist, whenever Reed has been quoted, these terms have been used unaltered despite their problematic nature.

Reed’s examination of ‘primitive’ people draws on various anthropologists’ works which range from documents on the Bantu tribes of Africa to studies of Australian Aborigines and Egyptian natives. She also studies the natural world, from which she, as an evolutionist, believes that human beings descended. In particular she has paid attention to the differences between males and females in the animal world. Drawing together these disparate threads, Reed creates a convincing view of human development from prehistoric emergence from the state of being animal to the modern, twentieth century society she experienced up until writing the text in 1975.

Reed’s standpoint, using almost identical data to many of the sexist evolutionists like Darwin, is that women would have led the descent from the apes. She writes that,

the violent characteristics of male sexuality in nature [which propels] males to strive for ‘dominance’ over the other males … [limits] their ability to cooperate with one another. Females, … far from being handicapped by the maternal functions [as evolutionists usually imply], acquired from them the very traits conducive to advancing from animality to human life and cooperative labor. Insofar as the sexes were unequally endowed by nature, the biological advantages for humanizing the species were on the side of the females, not the males (1975:44).

She cites numerous examples from nature in support of these assertions ranging from females of a species’ need to provide for not only themselves (as occurs with the male) but also for their offspring; to the affective care demonstrated by most mammals for their young. She also makes mention of the “biological handicap” that males’ “easily triggered combativeness” would have been “at the beginning of human life” (51). Reed further provides evidence far too elaborate to be summarised in this chapter that women, because of their relative sociability or because of their close connection to the
ground as a food source, were responsible for – amongst other innovations – the
domestication of animals, development of agriculture and medicine, hide-tanning to
make leather, basketry and early architecture (43-59). Thus does Reed place women
firmly in the foreground of the evolutionary process, with men lagging behind. She
creates in the mind of her reader “a matriarchal society in which women occupied
positions of leadership in productive and social life and were held in high esteem” (2).

Ehrenreich also reveals alternative views of prehistoric women when she outlines
some of the conclusions reached by more recent studies – including the fact that
women could have supplied up to 70% of a community’s calories through gathering
plant material – which subverts the concept of “man the hunter as provider” (1999:47).
She also makes mention of the “grandma hypothesis” where a postmenopausal woman
– who is usually seen as infertile and therefore useless by many evolutionists – had an
“evolutionary purpose” which was “to keep her grandchildren provided with [food] …
especially while Mom was preoccupied with a new baby” (47). Furthermore she refers
to recent research which suggests that women “may have been more important in
shaping the political economy of Paleolithic peoples” (47). Ehrenreich does, however,
warn against merely reversing the polarity which has existed in evolutionists’ thinking:

[n]o one … is suggesting a new view of human evolution centered on … woman-
the-hunter-gatherer and man-the-idle-camp-follower. Human evolution is a 2
million-year-long story at least, enacted in a multiplicity of settings – deserts and
forests, coastlines and vast continental plains, cool zones and tropical ones –
each requiring different survival strategies (48).

Despite educated “guesses” concerning human beings’ evolution, it is unlikely
that any final, uncontested version of the origin of humankind will ever exist. There will
always be alternative viewpoints which take into account accumulated data and artifacts
and reinterpret them. What is important is that these conflicting views are expressed
and evaluated, not suppressed so that one opinion is allowed to dominate as has
happened in not only anthropology and archeology, but in different studies all over the
world. Whether or not Reed is correct in her view of the existence of a strong
matriarchy in the early stages of humankind’s existence, for example, is not the vital
issue in this chapter. What is clear is that the prevailing ideology is sexist and does not
do justice to the contribution of women and so alternative viewpoints must be discussed
and evaluated.

Just as anthropological studies on the status of women have been problematic,
so too are studies of a more religious nature on the existence of a Goddess-worshipping
people in prehistoric times. Both the proponents and detractors of this theory are
articulate in their discussion of the topic. There is a school of thought which proposes
that, as B.A. Robinson writes in “Goddess Worship” (2000a), with “the emergence of the
Cro-Magnon people …. worship of the Great Goddess or Great Mother developed. For
these people, deity was female” (1, my emphasis). Shahrukh Husain supports this view
in The Goddess (1997), a text which brings together data and studies from all over the
world in demonstrating the prevalence of Goddess-worship. She also pays attention to
the change-over from Goddess-worship to those religions which followed it: “there was
once a Goddess-worshipping Golden Age … which was superceded by patriarchal
culture that imposed their own, male deities” (22). According to Husain, so-called
“Venus figures” are evidence of a prehistoric veneration of women and a Divine Female
principle, describing these archeological “finds” as “Paleolithic engravings, figurines and
paintings depicting women, especially in their role as mothers. Their vulvas, breasts,
buttocks and pregnant bellies were always prominent, in contrast to ill-defined heads
and limbs” (10). She writes that they “have been seen as proof of the existence of
ancient matriarchies” (8). Husain also expands on the concept of a “Golden Age of Woman”, writing that “[t]his society … was not concerned with conquest or domination, but concentrated its energies on a gynocentric … system of organization and artistic development” (16).

Another proponent of such female-centred thinking is Merlin Stone, whose provocatively titled When God Was A Woman (1975) argues for the dominance of Goddess-worshipping people. Stone writes, “[i]n prehistoric and early historic periods of human development, religions existed in which people revered their supreme creator as female. The Great Goddess … had been worshiped from the beginning of the Neolithic periods of 7000 BC until the closing of the last Goddess temple, about 500 AD” (xii). As Evelyn Reed and Barbara Ehrenreich write back against a sexist anthropology, so does Stone, who asserts that “[m]ost of the information and artifacts concerning the vast female religion … have been dug out of the ground only to be reburied in obscure archeological texts, carefully shelved away in exclusively protected stacks of university and museum libraries” (xvi). Stone claims that most scholastic work focused on this field has been conducted by people who are heavily influenced by their patriarchal, often-Christian backgrounds, with the consequence that Goddess-worship has been demonised or in some cases, ignored altogether (xviii).

Stone provides three basic reasons for her avowal of a Goddess-oriented society all of which are based on the pre-eminence of women in such a society. The first lies in the fact that in pre-technological societies, the father’s role in reproduction is often not understood nor, indeed, is the necessity for sexual intercourse for impregnation. Women are seen to fall pregnant because of their innate fertility or because of magic (Stone 1975:13; Reed 1975:8-9; Bolen, date not supplied:1). Mothers are therefore
seen as the “singular” parents of their offspring, “the lone producer of the next
generation” (11). Thus *kinship is traced through the female line* – because the male line
is considered irrelevant. The second strand of evidence Stone mentions is based upon
the first. Like tribal people today, early humans would have engaged in ancestor
worship (13). It is therefore highly likely that they would have revered the dead *women*
of their line. With this as a basis, Stone writes, “the concept of the creator of all human
life may have been formulated by the clan’s image of the woman who had been their
most ancient, their primal ancestor and that image [would] thereby [be] deified and
revered as Divine Ancestress” (13). The third line of evidence alludes to the
preponderance of Venus figures created during prehistoric times. The multiplicity of
these intensely female figures is said to indicate the high esteem in which these early
human beings held the Goddess. Stone quotes Johannes Maringer’s conclusion: “[i]t
appears highly probable then … that the female figurines were idols of a ‘great mother’
cult” (13). Stone’s three lines of evidence are drawn together in her assertion that the
Goddess was worshipped by so-called primitive people. Hélène Cixous comments on
this type of thinking, which she believes informs people’s comprehension of the world
and is part of the tradition against which Stone is writing. In “Sorties: Out and Out:
Attacks/Ways Out/Forays” (1989), Cixous identifies “‘the’ couple, man/woman” (102) as
the basis of logocentric thought which establishes binary oppositions in people’s
understanding of the world. According to Cixous, the ‘male’ part of a binary opposition
is valued above the ‘female’ part, and she provides the following list of man/woman
oppositions:

- Activity/Passivity
- Sun/Moon
- Culture/Nature
- Day/Night
She further asserts that “[o]rganisation by hierarchy makes all conceptual organisation subject to man” (102) and she denigrates the “phallocentric narcissism” of which she believes most men guilty (107). Following Cixous’ thinking then, it is understandable that the human race has usually been perceived as ‘progressing’ from a savage prehistoric past where the Goddess was worshipped to a civilised present where (a) God reigns supreme.

Stone also traces the decline of Goddess-worship, suggesting that in about 2400 BC Indo-Europeans began to move into the territories occupied by Goddess-worshippers, bringing “their own religion with them, the worship of a young warrior god and/or a supreme father god” (20). Where there was not violent takeover, a gradual assimilation of the Goddess-worshipping culture into the God-cult occurred. This eventually led to a breaking down of the matriarchal culture and its associated worship of the Goddess – although this process took millennia. Stone makes it clear that, despite the allure of this golden past where the Goddess was worshipped freely, she does not advocate regression into this ‘dream’. She writes,

I am not suggesting a return or revival of the ancient female religion …. I do hold the hope, however, that a contemporary consciousness of the once-widespread veneration of the female deity as the wise Creatress of the Universe and all life … may be used to cut through many oppressive and falsely founded patriarchal images, stereotypes, customs and laws (xxv).

As Stone suggests, when Goddess-worship was overthrown, it was replaced by androcentric God-worshipping religions of which Islam, Judaism and Christianity are examples. These ‘male’ religions not only worship male Gods, but also cater primarily
for the spiritual needs of men. In “The Essential Challenge” (1992), Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow suggest that this breakdown of tribal culture … led to the disruption of the holistic perspective that characterized early human societies. Woman and man, nature and culture, body and spirit, goddess and God, once bound together in a total vision of world renewal, became split off from each other and ordered hierarchically. When male culture-creating groups appropriated the positive side of each of these dualisms for themselves, the age-old male-female polarity was given a newly aggressive significance. Women were identified with nature, body, the material realm, all of which were considered distinctly inferior to transcendent male spirit (21).

Christ and Plaskow here indirectly allude to Cixous’ binary oppositions and show how the rise of androcentrism was at the cost of inter-relatedness which led to the devaluation of women and those qualities associated with them. As a consequence of such male-dominated thinking, many women have been abused and degraded over the centuries. Not only have they experienced oppression from others but often have internalised misogynistic worldviews and suffered self-imposed restrictions. In “Self-Blessing Ritual” (1992), Zsuzsanna E. Budapest confirms, “[i]f a woman internalizes her oppression and thinks she is inferior … she internalizes a policeman. She will then act accordingly. She will not need to be policed by actual oppressors because she will have assimilated their values and she will police herself” (271). Budapest further identifies religion as a primary conveyer of oppression and suggests that woman can fight against patriarchy by invoking “the Goddess …, the divine within women” (272).

Goddess-worship is not only an ancient religion linked to the beginnings of the human race. There are still some tribal people today who profess to worship a Goddess figure and, indeed, there is a contemporary grouping of people who worship a/the Goddess. Peggy Grove, in “Myths, Glyphs, and Rituals of a Living Goddess Tradition” (1999), has recorded evidence of what she terms, “a goddess religion, a living tradition
still in existence in … northern Australian Aboriginal land” (2). These tribal, Aboriginal people have been worshipping a major figure in their mythology, the Rainbow Serpent, for millennia. This figure was first recorded in rock art at least 6000 years ago (3). Grove indicates in her article that the Rainbow Serpent can be linked to women: “the female … is equated with the Rainbow Serpent of mythology, the creator of all that is and ever shall be” (7) and further indicates that “the female is the human representative of the mother Kunapipi [Great Ancestress], known as one mother for all people everywhere, the Goddess of the Aboriginal people” (15). Thus can one perceive an ongoing worship of the Goddess, refuting claims that God-worship has always dominated.

Husain also indicates that Goddess-worship is not as limited as some might believe. She writes, “numerous traditions of Goddess worship have flourished unbroken to the present day. The female divinity is popularly worshipped as Kali throughout India [and] …. various groups continue to worship the Goddess despite the evangelical efforts of Christian missionaries. Catholic countries … worship the female divinity in disguised forms as saints and in the shape of the Virgin Mary” (1997:150). Miriam Simos, a Goddess-worshipper who publishes under the pseudonym of “Starhawk”, suggests in “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” (1992) that worship of the Divine Female principle is becoming an increasingly important religion in the contemporary world. She claims that, after the suppression of Goddess-worship by patriarchal religions, “[t]he Goddess has at last stirred from sleep, and women are awakening to [their] … ancient power” (262). Starhawk, having great faith in the redemptive power of the goddess, writes, “I see the next few years as being crucial in the transformation of our culture away from the patriarchal death cults and toward the love of life, of nature, of the female principle ….
The long sleep of the Mother Goddess is ended. May she awaken in each of our hearts” (268).

As with the question of the status of women in prehistoric times, there is controversy surrounding the issue of a prehistoric worship of a Goddess-figure. In contrast with the pro-Goddess-worship writers, there are those who strongly oppose this line of thinking. In “The Not-So-Great-Goddess” (2000), Anastasia Bowles summarises the findings of one such critic, Cynthia Eller. Eller claims that those who assert prehistoric Goddess-worship base it on “shaky evidence” and believes that “this [assertion] … is hard to swallow” (58). Another critic is Tim Callahan, who in his “Review of The Alphabet Versus the Goddess” (1999) writes,

[...] the minute one sees the words ‘the Goddess,’ alarm bells should go off for anyone desiring to maintain objectivity in a matter as emotionally charged as the status of women in prehistory. Capitalizing the word and giving it the definite article (The Goddess) implies a preexisting worship of a single feminine deity. We really do not know if there ever was a period in prehistoric times when there was a feminine gendered monotheism or even near monotheism (1).

It is highly unlikely that we will ever know for certain the actual extent – if any – of prehistoric Goddess worship and it is certainly not the intention of this exploration of the phenomenon to determine this extent. What is certain, however, is that the idea of the Goddess can be used as a liberating force, one which women can use to free themselves from patriarchy. Its symbols of female strength can be powerful reminders to women that they too have untapped strengths and that what they have been taught is not necessarily the only truth. In “Why Women Need the goddess” (1992), Carol P. Christ asserts, “[t]he simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of the goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power” (277).
Apart from the potential feminist benefits of investigating goddess-worship, there are those who suggest that people who worship the Divine Feminine are in an optimal position to be of benefit to Planet Earth. In their “Introduction” to *Womanspirit Rising* (1992), Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow observe that patriarchal religions like Christianity are based on a “dualistic mentality” which makes distinctions between man and woman, culture and nature, spirit and flesh (5). As Cixous has observed, such binary thinking often leads to exploitation because the valued half of the two is seen as the controller of the unvalued side (1989:102). Lacking a holistic worldview, people who engage in dualistic thinking can quite easily take from nature without considering the reciprocal consequences of their actions – or, indeed, oppress women without perceiving the negativity of such actions. Christ and Plaskow note these connecting features of dualism, “the dualistic world view contains the seeds of ecological crisis; for, if the world and nature are seen as mere matter then they are subject to human control and exploitation. Classic dualism also became the model for the oppression of women” (5).

Clarissa Pinkola Estes also connects images of women’s oppression with environmental degradation in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992). In her text, which is designed as a self-help book for women, Estes argues that women have been oppressed for centuries and suggests that a method for overcoming this oppression lies in connecting with the “Wild Woman”, a spiritual force strongly linked with nature and identifiable with the Goddess. She writes,

> Over time, we have seen the feminine instinctive nature looted, driven back, and overbuilt. For long periods it has been mismanaged like the wildlife and the wildlands .... [A]s soon and as often as we turn our backs, it is relegated to the poorest land of the psyche. The spiritual lands of the Wild Woman have, throughout history, been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed, and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others.
It’s not by accident that the pristine wilderness of our planet disappears as the understanding of our own inner wild nature fades (3).

In “Motherearth and the Megamachine” (1992), Rosemary Radford Reuther concurs with such thinking, “wom[e]n have been identified with nature, the earth, and the body in its despised and rejected form” (51) and suggests that the above-mentioned dualistic thinking led to “[t]he ethic of competitiveness and technological mastery [which] has created a world divided by penis-missiles and countermissiles that could destroy all humanity a hundred times over” (51). In Cixous’ terms, then, binary oppositions must be eliminated and the poles merged in order to prevent pernicious domination by the ‘male’ aspects. Reuther’s solution to this problem is that “[w]omen must be the spokesmen (sic) for a new humanity rising out of the conciliation of spirit and body” (51, my emphasis). Thus can strong connections between Goddess-feminism and ecology be seen. The investigation of Goddess-worship is not only of potential benefit to women all over the world, it is also a possible saviour of this planet. By addressing dualistic disparities in much of the world’s thinking, women can not only save themselves, but the Earth too.

Alice Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) is a novel which deals with all of the concerns mentioned so far in this chapter: the evolution of the human race, the status of women in prehistoric times, worship of the Goddess, the consequences of dualistic thought, as well as the ecological state of Earth. In this novel, she has – like Stone, Ehrenreich and Reed – challenged perceptions of the past. Walker is undoubtedly a person to whom the tackling of perceived injustices is important since not only does she take note of exploitation and oppression the world over, but she also takes issue with it. She has, as Evelyn C. White indicates in “Alice Walker on Activism” (1997), been involved in activism on issues ranging from religion and motherhood to
female genital mutilation and South Africa’s struggle for freedom from apartheid (136). Her forms of protest have included letter-writing to prominent politicians, fundraising and civil disobedience (White, Smith 1999). Naturally, such concerns on Walker’s part have filtered through into her writings – which have, in fact, at times been the medium of expression for these concerns. Pamela A. Smith, in the article “Green Lap, Brown Embrace, Blue Body” (1999) refers to Walker’s use of a word borrowed from the Oglala Sioux, “Wasichu”, in order to indicate her disgust for certain types of people. “Wasichu” means “fat-eaters” or “fat-takers” and, Smith writes, she “applies the term to any and all who are racist, sexist, classist [or] environmentally insensitive” (473). In The Temple of My Familiar (hereafter referred to as Temple), Wasichu feature prominently. They are almost invariably white and usually men – racist exploiters, slavers, plantation owners and prospectors. Their role in oppressing South African black people, Native American Indians, Australian Aborigines, Indonesian natives and the Maori of New Zealand is discussed in the text (1989:341). Walker even criticises the Louvre and other museums when Fanny Nzingha says, “[t]here was all the booty from other countries on display because, really, that is what most museums are for. Instead of these looters stealing just for themselves and their own houses, they steal for their countries, their continents, their race” (293). This fat-taking image of ‘looting booty’ indicates Walker’s strong dislike of such an avaricious attitude. In fact, this expression can also be taken quite literally because reference is made to an African tribe’s habitually vegetarian diet and the benefits of such a fat-free lifestyle: “the natives quite often live [for a hundred years] … They say it is because everything they eat is alive … They eat fruit, grains … and root crops … They eat little or no meat and when asked to prepare large slabs of it … they handle it as if it is offensive” (239).
Walker is a self-proclaimed womanist, a term which Gretchen E. Ziegenhals defines as a person “who speaks out, speaks up, speaks against or in defense of something important, a woman who loves herself, her culture, and who is committed to survival” (quoted in Smith 1999:471). Smith further indicates that a womanist is usually a woman of colour (471). Walker, as a womanist, is concerned for the fate of women, for people of colour, for the fate of the Earth and, in fact, any situation where exploitation occurs. Following Cixous’ thinking, it can be seen that Walker has taken note of the men/women, white people/people of colour, culture/nature oppositions which can be found in society and seeks to challenge them in Temple.

Just as the term “ecofeminist” indicates a relationship between challenging women’s oppression and challenging environmental degradation, so does “ecowomanist” imply a connection between womanist and ecological concerns. Walker, then, can be defined specifically as an ecowomanist. She has, in fact, expressed the thought that “Earth itself … has become the nigger of the world” (quoted in Smith:473). In a speech, “The Story of Why I Am Here” (1994), Walker shares the following thoughts: “The Earth on which we live is the body of God. All people and living things are the body and soul of God …. [W]e do not serve God by making the [E]arth and its people suffer but by making the [E]arth and its people whole” (40, my emphasis). Clearly then, Walker does not express dualistic thought as is often uncovered in Western thinking, seeking rather to integrate than segregate. She is able to see the interconnectedness of things and has challenged the hierarchical organisation which has occurred in such thought. Under her gaze, women, nature, people of colour and the flesh all become valued.
This sense of connectedness is a prominent theme in *Temple* and is often found in Miss Lissie’s telling of her past lives, which form part of the narrative of the novel. As Margaret Busby writes in “Literary Feature Reviews” (1990), “her memories of previous incarnations are vividly, and educationally-told tales of severance from the tribe, of slave traders shaving their African captives’ untamed hair …, tales of changing gender, race, even species” (202). Miss Lissie tells of a time early in the evolution of the human race, when she was a pigmy-type figure with close links to the great apes, whom she refers to as “[o]ur cousins” and describes as “big … and black and hairy, with big teeth, flat, black faces, and piercingly intelligent and gentle eyes” (1989:100). In fact, she clearly believes that “her cousins were people, even more peoplelike than the folks from her own branch of the family” (111). Attitudes towards the ‘Hottentot Venus’, the real-life Saartjie Baartman¹, are of relevance to this argument. So-called scientific discourse of the early nineteenth century claims that Baartman, as a Hottentot woman, represents a low form of humanity, an almost–animal distinct from superior white people. In “Black Bodies, White Bodies” (1986), Sander L. Gilman refers to such thinkers’ perception that “the black occupied the antithetical position to the white on the scale of humanity, [that of ] …. the lowest rung on the great chain of being” (231). Baartman therefore represented, to such white colonialists and scientists, a race entirely different from their own, a sub-human species almost on a par with animals. While such thinkers used the figure of Baartman to reinforce the binary of human versus animal, in *Temple*, Walker denies the existence of such binaries when Miss Lissie describes the strong links

¹ David Adey et al, in *Companion to South African English Literature* (1986), indicate that Saartjie Baartman was “in 1810 bought by an English dealer and exported … to the funfares (sic) and circuses of Europe where, her steatopygous buttocks having provoked gross lampoons …. she died … of alcoholic poisoning” (102).
between animals and humans during the emergence of the human race from animality.

In doing so, Miss Lissie describes the history of humanity in a way similar to that of Evelyn Reed who, for example, also describes a time when the lines between animal and human would have been blurred,

[s]avages did not have such knowledge [as the distinctions between the species]. This is especially true of the primordial period .... Before hominids had attained their own fully human characteristics, the lines between diverse creatures made of flesh and blood were not at all clear to them (1975:29).

Miss Lissie tells Suwelo of the strong links which existed between all of their extended human/animal clan: “They seemed nearly unable to comprehend separateness; they lived and breathed as a family; then as a clan; then as a forest, and so on. If I hurt myself and cried, they cried with me, as if my pain was magically transposed to their bodies” (102). Later, when a split develops between the apes and her people, she tells of the anguish she experiences (103). She further blames dualistic thinking for the breakdown of the harmonious co-existing women and men of her tribe share, claiming,

the idea of ownership – which grew out of the way the forest had began to be viewed as something cut into pieces that belonged to this tribe or that – came into human arrangements. Then it was that men, because they were stronger, at least during those periods when women were weak from childbearing, began to think of owning women and children (104).

According to Walker, then, the conception of one sex as greater than the other or of humans being the controllers of nature is almost as old as the human race.

Miss Lissie speaks of the vast differences which exist between the prehistoric, holistic worldview and modern, dualistic thought:

The times of today are nothing, nothing like the times of old. The time of writing is so different from the so much longer time of no writing. People’s very eyes are no longer the same. The time of living separate from the earth is so much different from the much longer time of living with it, as if being on your mother’s breast. Can you imagine a time when there was no such thing as dirt? (401-2).
In “Toward a Monistic Idealism” (1992), Ikenna Dieke sees this wholeness as being the essence of Temple, writing that this novel

   can be read as a romance of the development of the human psyche, in which the human ego strives consciously and unconsciously for wholeness. Man as separate from woman, humans as separate from animals, one race as separate from another, the old as separate from the young – all that foists a … self-destructive narcissism, a half-personality at best (512).

Evelyn Reed clearly defines women as the sex which would have led the way in guiding early humans into being fully human. Walker concurs, clearly labeling women the more advanced sex. Zedé tells “what happened … in the beginning, at about the same time the toucan was created …. [A] woman … produced a being somewhat unlike herself, … [a] little hombre [man]” (61). She goes on to say that when this ‘little man’ found other males, these “first men were so new to each other that all they could into each other’s eyes – for centuries! …. This meant they had no self-consciousness about how they looked” (61). Unlike these newly-formed human men, women were already conscious of themselves as people, having been human for longer, and so had moved on to self-adornment, which they indulged along with “gathering food” or being “host to a man” (61).

Reed also describes a time in human beings’ evolution when men and women lived separately. The women and children lived in one place, with the men and almost-adult young men in another (1975:139). Unlike the monogamous, single-dwelling family of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such separateness allowed a far greater degree of independent living, with each of the sexes living as they chose. Walker describes a similar situation in a “dream memory” of Miss Lissie’s: “the children live with their mothers and aunts; our fathers and uncles are nearby, and we visit and are often visited by them, but we live with the women” (99-100). She also describes yet
another time when she ‘was’ a young white man, indicating that the “time arrived when I was expected to mate. In our group this was the initiation not only into adulthood, but into separation from the women’s tribe …. After mating …, a man went to live with men” (395).

Through the character of Olivia, Walker expresses her rejection of Christianity, which Olivia defines as “a religion of conquest and domination” (1989:166). In fact, Walker has objected to ‘male’ religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam because, “[m]en and their religions have tended to make love for anything and anybody other than themselves and their Gods an objectional thing, a shame” (quoted in Smith 1999:472). Even as she rejects Christianity, though, Walker has expressed admiration for Jesus Christ who, she suggests “advocated the healthful perception of oneself, of women, of people of color, and folks at large” (quoted in Smith:474). In her personal life, Walker has adopted a “pan-religious and pantheist” religious approach (Smith:474). Her beliefs have spilt over into Temple. Miss Lissie, for example, defines sin for Suwelo, not as defiance of God’s law, but as a “denial of another’s reality of who and what she or he actually is” (1989:390). Furthermore, frequent mention is made of Celie and Shug’s “church”, “a group of people … whose notion of spiritual reality is radically at odds with mainstream or prevailing ones”. This “church” is not depicted as a negative grouping but rather as a positive “band” of people (330). The religion Olivia does support is based on an African traditional spirituality “where people worshiped many things, including the roofleaf plant, which they used to cover their houses” (166). She further indicates “that ‘God’ was not a monolith, and not the property of Moses, as

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1 Although most texts quoted in this chapter make use of “worshippers” and “worshipped”, Walker refers to “worshipers” and “worshiped”. Her original spelling has been retained in excerpts from Temple.
[Africans had] … been led to think, and not separate from us, or absent from whatever world one inhabited” (166). Olivia suggests, “much that our people had been taught about religion, much that diminished them and kept them in oppression would naturally fall away” if Christianity were rejected by African people (166). Clearly, then, Christianity has not brought ‘enlightenment’ to Africa. In forcing Christianity onto Africans, missionaries also forced a type of thinking, which is counterproductive to mental health – although productive for Western pockets. This thinking teaches that parts are unconnected and one need not concern oneself with consequences for taking from someone or something. As Busby suggests, “Walker is acclaiming orature, African oral tradition, and at the same time reclaiming tribal spirituality … from the colonising influence of religion” (1990:202, my emphasis).

One can see that Walker has expressed an evolutionist’s standpoint in Temple. The emergence of the human race is described in her text in much the same way that Reed envisions it. The initial high status of women – as the leaders in evolutionary progress – is made clear in the novel. There is also an examination of how women have fallen from this elevated position. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Walker blames dualistic thought, as evinced by men, for the start of the fall of women: “men, because they were stronger, … began to think of owning women and children …. When man saw he could own one woman and her children, he became greedy and wanted as many as he could get” (104). Thus men’s relative strength became equated with a right-to-rule. When this right-to-rule became a common feature of society, women, as is the case with natural resources, became property to be used and exploited as men saw fit. In another of Miss Lissie’s lives, she tells how she, as a young African tribesperson, along with her mother and siblings, is sold into slavery by her uncle. This uncle, who
“already had more wives and children and slaves than he knew what to do with” (75, my emphasis), sells them into slavery. After being humiliated, raped, undernourished and burned with a branding iron, she arrives in America – only to die within a few years after being beaten by her master (86). Her horrific story brings home the immense loss and degradation which can result from the right-to-rule expressed by Wasichu of all races.

Walker offers further insight into the fall of women’s societal position, describing two queens in very different ways. The earlier queen is the leader of a tribe of about two hundred people near the beginning of the development of the human race. She is not queen in the sense of giving orders and being in charge of the group, rather she is “a wise woman, a healer, a woman of experience and vision … [a] really good person, whose words were always heard by the clan” (392). The second queen is Anne Nzingha, who is said to have ruled Angola and fought against the Portuguese for forty years (291). According to Fanny Nzingha, who is named after this queen,

the woman … refused the title Queen and required that her subjects call her ‘King’; the woman …, like Joan of Arc, always dressed as a man and led her troops into battle. [She was at] … once woman, man, king, queen, master strategist and fighter, daughter, woman, pagan and Catholic supreme ruler and wily female (291).

Anne Nzingha, unlike the unnamed queen of an earlier time, cannot rule as a woman; she must appear to be masculine in order to rule. In the time from the emergence of early humans to colonisation of Africa, the concept of womanhood had become so degraded that a woman could still rule – but only by appearing to be at least tokenly male.

Along with the decline of women’s status came an exploitation of the land. Walker particularly links this exploitation with the oppression of the African people through colonisation. Olivia tells of her time in Africa with her missionary parents, “[t]he
Africa that we encountered had already been raped of much of it sustenance. Its people had been sold into slavery …. Millions of trees had been shipped to … European countries …; its minerals and metals mined" (168). She also describes the plantations that the colonialists created and controlled: "[t]his plantation system used people up in fewer than seven years, and used up the soil as well; it also effectively destroyed the native wild rubber trees …. Where there had once been leafy forest, there was now widespread erosion" (170). Miss Lissie’s earliest memories – which incorporate wholeness and interconnectedness – show the extent to which Walker believes human beings have fallen. The rape, pillage and plunder which result from loss of the sense of wholeness, from a sense of being different to and separate from others, form a large part of her novel.

Arguably the most controversial issue that Walker raises in her novel is that of Goddess-worship in prehistoric times. The fact that the novel is dedicated “To Robert in whom the Goddess shines” is the first suggestion of Goddess-oriented thinking. The underlying premise of many of Miss Lissie’s stories is that there is – and always was – a Divine Female principle who has been worshipped since human beings were recognisable as people. Walker is specific about the source of Goddess-worship: She, “Our Black Lady, the Great Mother of All, [is] … Mother Africa” (223). Nzingha elaborates, “She is Isis, mother of Horus, sister and lover of Osiris, Goddess of Egypt. The Goddess who, long before she became Isis, was known all over Africa as simply the Great Mother, Creator of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth – *The Goddess*” (296).

Not only does Walker establish the preeminence of an African Goddess over a Western God, she also firmly sets women in the place of spiritual leaders of their
people. Zedé tells of the development of this phenomenon, saying that men were so amazed at the thought of women giving birth that “they imagined a _mujer muy grande_, larger than the sky, producing, somehow, the earth. A goddess. And so, if the producer of the earth was a large woman, a goddess, then women must be her priests, and must possess great and supernatural powers” (62). Reed would agree with Walker’s assessment, writing as she does about the “high status of women” in a matrilineal society where women’s preeminence as cultivators was registered in fertility rites and other practices conducted by the female sex, as well as their glorification as ‘_goddesses_’” (1975:131-2, my emphasis). Hal also tells of a time when Miss Lissie claimed that “she _remembered_ that women were called first [to be spiritual leaders] and this calling was something men then took away from them” (115).

Walker furthermore portrays the destruction of this Goddess-worship and the extent to which Western thought has ‘forgotten’ the contributions made by Africa and Africans. Nzingha describes being sent to France to study and discovering there that her professors found it “impossible … to acknowledge that ancient Cyrene [a nation which traded with the West] was Libya, or that the ancient Egyptians were black ….

When they did discuss Africa they did so in terms of its problems, its ‘backwardness’, never in terms of its contributions or its centuries of oppression under whites” (294-5). Walker specifically blames Christianity and Islam for a large part of the breakdown of Goddess-worship, claiming that that those who openly “worshipped the Goddess were routinely killed, sold into slavery or converted to Islam [or Christianity] at the point of the sword” (222). She also refers to the burning at the stake of those who worshipped the Goddess (222). Walker describes the Goddess-worshipping tribespeople who “carried on the ancient tradition of worship of the mother” (78). According to Miss Lissie, these
“Motherworshipers” were very difficult to convert to other, dominant religions but although they “were devoted to the Goddess ... they were broken” (78). She further suggests that “the ultimate curse against Africa/Mother/Goddess – motherfucker – is still in the language. It would have been unthinkable in the Old Days, and a person saying it would have been immediately asked for his tongue” (78).

M.J. Cutter indicates in her review, “Fragmentation and Unification, Myth and Metaphor” (1994), that Jaqueline de Weever has written on black women writers’ use of myth in their novels, including in her study Temple. Walker is one of the authors who, according to de Weever, “reshape[s] figures from old mythologies, ... create[s] new myths from old structures, and ... give[s] new meaning to ... myth[s] ... by transforming them into metaphors for psychological growth” (quoted in Cutter:667). This process as identified by de Weever is clearly illuminated when Nzingha shares her reinterpretation of the Medusa-Perseus myth. She describes an art history class where the discussion is centered on a slide depicting the slaying of Medusa by Perseus. The slide shows “Perseus in his chariot, and in his hand ... was the severed head of Medusa, her snakelike locks of hair depicted as real snakes .... Her face was horribly contorted, as yours would be, too, if someone had just hacked off your head. The rest of her rather large, womanly body is still on its knees” (295-6). Nzingha suggests that the slide does not merely depict a Greek myth of Perseus, a “brave, white man” defeating the “dragon” (297), it represents the destruction of African Goddess-worship by the God-worshipping Greeks. She says,

if you are from Africa you recognize Medusa's wings as the wings of Egypt, and you recognize the head of Medusa as the head of Egypt; and what you realize you are seeing is the Western world’s memorialization of that period in prehistory when the white male world of Greece decapitated and destroyed the black female Goddess/Mother tradition and culture of Africa (298).
In this reinterpretation, Walker is essentially writing back against centuries of oppression of Africa by the West. She is providing alternative ways of comprehending Western myth, ways which de-centre the West as the source of culture and civilisation. In “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1997), Hélène Cixous comments on the attempt by patriarchy to stifle women by equating them with the ‘dreadful’ Medusa, darkest Africa and the dark and then further reveals how women have been taught to fear the dark because men have told them “you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can’t see anything in the dark, you’re afraid. Don’t move, you might fall. Most of all, don’t go into the forest. And so we [women] have internalised this horror of the dark” (349). For Cixous, the essence of women’s liberation lies in embracing the Medusa, or ‘dark’ within. She writes, “[t]he Dark Continent is neither dark, nor unexplorable. – It is still unexplored only because we’ve been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable …. They [the majority of men] riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss” (354). Like Walker, Cixous refuses to accept the ‘place’ that women (or, in the case of Walker, people of colour or any marginalised people) have been allocated. These women reclaim what patriarchy and racism have declared to be the dreadful ‘other’ and have re-valued it.

Walker again challenges perceptions of European whites – who are typically seen as the more advanced race – in Fanny’s story of prehistoric times when the first white men were born in Africa. She links black people’s physical features, their pigmentation, or “melanin” and their “pads of wooly hair” (352), to a close and positive worshipping of the sun, claiming “[o]ur relationship to the sun is the bedrock of our security as black human beings” (352) for which they are physiologically adapted. She compares this to the “African white man [who] was born without melanin …. He was
unprotected from the sun. He must have felt cursed by God” (352). Fanny claims that this sense of being “cursed” would have scarred the white man, making him angry and bitter. The man would therefore create a new God to whom he could relate – “[h]e could put a new god in … place that more closely resembled himself: cold, detached, given to violent rages and fits of jealousy” (352). As with the Medusa-Perseus myth, Walker here reshuffles typical Western perceptions by comparing white to black people and revealing the former to be lacking.

Possibly the most valuable lesson a woman could learn from The Temple of My Familiar is to embrace all of her selves in the same way that Miss Lissie does, although not necessarily because she remembers past lives. All people have different parts to themselves, some of which are expressed and some of which are hidden. Alice Walker’s challenge to women – and men – is to explore all of these selves and to be the best composite person one can be from one’s selves. As Miss Lissie says, she contains “everybody and everything” within herself, and so she needs to be “loved … wholeheartedly, as a goddess” (409) – as do all women.
Chapter 2: The Witch

If studies of the Goddess and Goddess-worshipping people are plagued with controversy, then the study of witches and witchcraft is arguably even more so. Just as Goddess-study is littered with conflicting opinions, so is the wide field that encompasses witchcraft study. Many scholars in this field disagree on matters such as the basic definition of a witch, what constitutes witchcraft and whether witches and witchcraft really exist. B.A. Robinson, in an article entitled “Witchcraft in Africa” (2000b), asserts that “[t]here are at least 15 mostly unrelated activities which have been called ‘witchcraft;’ it is as close to a universal snarl word as exists in the English language” (1). This chapter will attempt to ‘unsnarl’ some of the information surrounding this issue by discussing manifestations of so-called witches and witchcraft and providing a brief overview of the history of women’s association with witchery. The so-called ‘Burning Times’, when alleged witches were burned en masse by witch hunters, will be examined, followed by a discussion of modern witchcraft, Wicca. South African witches and witchdoctors – as well as the devastating consequences of witch hunts – will also be examined. Finally, Anne Landsman’s novel, The Devil’s Chimney (1997), and Njabulo S. Ndebele’s short story “The prophetess” (1994) will be discussed in an attempt to uncover how witches are presented in these South African texts.

Common images of witches generally involve ugly old women casting spells. Indeed, as Robert Todd Carroll suggests in his online The Skeptic’s Dictionary (1998), “the typical witch is generally portrayed as an old hag in a black robe, wearing a pointy black cap and flying on a broomstick across a full moon” (1). An examination of witchcraft, however, reveals that only a tiny percentage – if any – of witches could relate
to this image. Witches mean different things to different people and as this chapter unfolds, some of these different meanings will be uncovered and discussed. An investigation of the online encyclopedia services of Britannica (2000) and Encarta (2000) reveals an awareness of the problem of identifying witches. The Britannica entry for “witchcraft” identifies it as “the use of supernatural means for harmful or evil ends” but further acknowledges that “in some societies … witches were believed occasionally to pursue beneficial aims, such as the healing of the sick” (1). The Encarta entry is less prescriptive, describing “witchcraft” as the “practice of magic or sorcery by those outside the religious mainstream of a society; the term is used in different ways in various historical and social contexts” (1). Although it is difficult to fix a definition for witchcraft, its individual practitioners, or witches, are usually quite fixed in their understanding of witching. For this reason, rather than providing one, generalised and partially inaccurate definition, whenever a ‘new’ form of witchcraft is mentioned in this chapter, that particular aspect will be defined at that point.

The link between women and witchcraft is a strong one, having been forged over centuries, even millennia. Meir Bar-Ilan traces this association in the article “Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud” (1999). Bar-Ilan asserts that “the specifically ‘female’ social aspect of this occupation [i.e. witchcraft]” reveals a great deal about the relationship between men and women in the “ancient world” (1) and suggests that because women were usually denied access to positions of power in society, they often turned to other means of control – of which witchcraft is one. Men, perceiving a danger in women’s reach for power, then outlawed the practice of witchcraft so that witches – who were usually women – could be controlled (7). Bar-Ilan writes, “it appears that the double relationship between witchcraft and women … was but part of the imparting of a
demonic nature to female activities and linking these to Satan” (7). She further discusses the dynamic of demonization of women as found in such societies: “[w]ith the aid of this accusation [of witchcraft], the upper class strengthened its status over the lower class, and cast the blame upon the weak (physically and politically) women, as a solution to the ills of society” (7-8). Thus were women not only denied power in their societies, they were also denied other means of expressing themselves as legitimate, in-control beings. Because men, having denied legitimate power to women, now perceived a danger in some women’s ability to control through psychic means, they made it a sin to do so.

This negative perception of women as uncovered by Bar-Ilan is not limited to Biblical times. Helen Ellerbe, in The Dark Side of Christian History (1995), reveals a centuries-old misogyny on the part of the Christian Church. Although not all of the sexist churchmen mentioned by Ellerbe make the connection between women and witchcraft per se, they all denigrate women and establish a link between women and sin in general. Among the examples Ellerbe includes is a quotation from the second century by St. Clement of Alexandria, “[e]very woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman” (1). Boethius, a sixth century writer, wrote that “[w]oman is a temple built upon a sewer” and, in a similar vein, Odo of Cluny suggested that “[t]o embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of manure” (quoted in Ellerbe:1). Furthermore, Ellerbe indicates that the Council of Macan, in the sixth century, debated whether women have souls, while Lutherans contemplated whether women “were really human beings at all” (1). The handbook which was used as a guide for the interrogation of supposed witches during the Burning Times, the Malleus Maleficarum (1486), explains that women are more susceptible to the lure of witchcraft “[b]ecause the female sex is
more concerned with things of the flesh than men” (quoted in Ellerbe:1). Clara Alvey in her article “Witch Trials: Social Persecutions” (1998) specifically links witch hunts to the attempts of the Christian Church to “ruin the reputation and … character of women” (3).

The linking of women and witchcraft is not, however, specifically a European notion. In Africa Before They Came (1974), Galbraith Welch, examining pre-colonised Africa, also indicates that women specifically were connected to the practice of witching. Welch writes, “[f]emale witches … figured throughout the sub-Sahara. They occurred all along the West Coast, in East Africa and in South Africa. Male witches were comparatively rare” (325). Furthermore, as Welch indicates, women were often feared because of their potential to be witches, not necessarily because they were witches: “[m]agic power was a quality possessed or acquired only by some women, but the fact that a woman, any woman, might have magic at her beck and call made all women objects of awe, suspicion and alarm” (324-5, my emphasis). With such misogynist notions forming the backdrop for our twentieth-first century world, it is perhaps not surprising that feminists have struggled to the present day to establish themselves as the equals of men – and also that a woman who dares to vocalise her dissatisfaction with the status quo is often denigrated as a ‘witch’ for her outspokenness.

Being named a witch is often not the worst that can befall an outspoken woman. The ‘Burning Times’ refer to a period in history when a great many so-called witches were actually executed – usually by burning – for the crime of witchcraft. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the ‘facts’ of this phenomenon, ranging from the exact number of alleged witches who were burned, to the identity of the victims and who was responsible for the witch hunts. Jenny Gibbons, in her well-substantiated article
“Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch Hunt” (1998), indicates that in

around 1550, the persecution [of so-called witches] skyrocketed. What we think of as 'The Burning Times' – the crazes, panics, and mass hysteria – largely occurred in one century, from 1550-1650. In the 17th century, the Great Hunt passed nearly as suddenly as it had arisen. Trials dropped sharply after 1650 and disappeared completely by the end of the 18th century (4).

The exact number of 'witches' who were executed is also challenged. Some claim in excess of nine million died, while others designate numbers from 30 000 victims (Dunwich 1997:25-6, Gibbons 1998:8-9, Green 1998). Even if it is true, as Richard J. Green suggests in his article “How Many Witches” (1998), that “[t]o the people who died it makes little difference whether millions were killed or only thousands” (1), it is still important to note that many people did die because they were found guilty of witchcraft.

The question of who was executed is also a controversial issue. Some writers, like Anne Llewelyn Barstow in Witchcraze (1994), claim “witchcraft was quintessentially the crime of women” (148-9). Barstow indicates that 80% of the accused and 85% of those executed were women (23). Gibbons concurs, writing that

[o]ne basic fact about the Great Witch Hunt stands out: most of the people accused were women. Even during the Hunt itself, commentators noticed this. Some speculated that there were 10,000 female witches for every male witch, and a host of misogynist explanations were trotted out to account for this fact. Later, the predominance of women led some feminists to theorize that 'witch' and 'woman' were virtually synonymous [and] that the persecution was caused by Europe's misogyny (1998:8).

Gibbons cautions that people should bear in mind that one should not create naïve images of “evil witch hunters” burning “noble witches” (10) and progress no further than that. She, as an example, refers to the common perception that traditional woman healers, or “white witches”, were the primary victims of witch hunts because “[t]he Church and State sought to break the power of these women by accusing them of
Both the Encarta entry for witchcraft and Ellerbe present a similar viewpoint that “[o]ld, wise healing women were particular targets for witch-hunters” (Ellerbe 1995:7). Gibbons, however, demonstrates that this is not a valid interpretation of the data which exists on the Witch Hunt and also cites other sources which debunk this myth. She writes that “[h]ealers made up a small percentage of the accused, usually between 2% and 20% depending on the country. There was never a time or place where the majority of accused witches were healers” (7, my emphasis). Such conflicting opinions make it difficult to ascertain exactly what the witch hunt victims had in common. Although one cannot identify fixed characteristics which all the accused witches possessed, Thomas J. Schoeneman, in his article “Criticisms of Psychopathological Interpretation of Witch Hunters” (1996), has identified certain characteristics which increased a person’s chances of being accused. He suggests that women were accused more than men and that unmarried, older and/or poverty-stricken women were all substantially more likely to be accused (3). Gibbons adds to the list that many seemed to be “alienated from their neighbors, or seen as ‘different’ and disliked” and also that “[t]raditional magick users [pagans] might have had a slightly higher chance of being accused” (7). In “Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Woman To Live” (1995), Shantell Powell suggests that witch hunts are essentially “pogrom[s] against women” (1) or “gynocide[s]” (3) which result from men’s attempts to control women. She writes that, according to those who persecuted women in the past, men can be compared to women in a series of binary oppositions: “sexually calm”/“over-sexed”, “good”/“evil”, “God-fearing”/“witches”, “man”/“woman” and further notes the strong link such people perceived between women’s sexuality and their ‘proclivity’ to becoming witches (1). Powell insists that men’s fearing the sexuality of women lies at the root of
witch hunts, describing witches’ supposed ability to steal men’s penises as the “pinnacle of gynophobia” (7).

Sasha Haarhoff, in “Witches, Puritans and Sexuality” (1998), notes that accusations of witchcraft “revolved around issues of sexuality and generativity” and, like Powell, highlights witches’ ‘ability’ to “depriv[e] [a] man of his virile member” (1). In this article, she particularly focuses on accusations of witchery aimed at women who defied authority in seventeenth century America. She comments that “to fail to subject oneself to men adequately was cause for defamation of a woman” (2) – and this usually implied the man calling a woman a witch publicly. According to Haarhoff, ‘crying witch’, then, would have acted as a form of social control of unruly women: “the concept of ‘witch’ and the charge of witchcraft helped to set and police the boundaries of female acceptability and normality. Women that stepped out of these boundaries were vulnerable to masculine apprehension and mistrust” (3). As is demonstrated by Powell and Haarhoff, women – because of their sexuality – are perceived to be a danger not only to man, but also to the entire social order.

Most people who had the misfortune of being accused of witchcraft underwent horrors which foreshadowed those of the Nazi concentration camps. Two Dominican monks, Heinrich Kraemer and Jacob Sprenger, were instructed by Pope Innocent VIII to write a manual for the use of witch hunters. Their creation, the Malleus Maleficarum (the “Hammer of the Witches”), was published in 1486 and used as a guide for the interrogation and torture of those who were accused of witchcraft (Silvermoon 1996:1-2). Paul Halsall’s translated extracts of this guide reveal a systematic methodology:

The method of beginning an examination by torture is as follows: First the jailers prepare the implements of torture, then they strip the prisoner …. This stripping is lest some means of witchcraft may have been sewed into the clothing …. [W]hen the implements of torture have been prepared, the judge … tries to persuade the
prisoner to confess the truth freely … [but if she/he will not do so], the witch can be induced to speak the truth. Then the jailers must carry out the sentence, and torture the prisoner according to the accepted methods, with more or less severity as the delinquent’s crime may demand … if he [the accused, sic] confesses under torture, he [sic] must afterward be conducted to another place, that he [sic] may confirm it and certify that it was not due alone to the force of torture (quoted in Halsall 1996:4).

Ellerbe details some of the forms of torture, which include sexual mutilation, flogging and sexual abuse. Marvin Harris, in Cows, Pigs, Wars & Witches (1974), provides more detailed descriptions of instruments of torture like the rack, the thumbscrew, red-hot irons and “chairs with sharp points heated from below” amongst others (211). Given the means of extricating ‘confessions’, it is not surprising that so many of the accused admitted to practising witchcraft.

There were several factors which, when combined, created a climate in which this witch hunt could occur. Perhaps the most influential was the small, peasant-type communities in which most of the alleged witches lived. Edward Bever, in his article “Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease” (2000), suggests that accusations of witchcraft are far more likely to occur in “small, isolated agricultural communities” because “the bonds that exist [between people] are tight. Since the parties to a dispute can avoid each other only with difficulty, tensions can build steadily” (5). He further suggests that when people feel “fear … anxiety, anger, depression, despondency, resentment … [or] frustration” (5), they are far more likely to experience symptoms of stress, which – in turn – can lead to accusations of witchcraft. Therefore any stressors in a community could lead to stress being experienced by individual members of that community – which could facilitate the accusations of witchcraft. Alvey suggests certain phenomena which Medieval and Renaissance people may have experienced as sources of stress and which might have facilitated the accusations
which occurred, namely the relatively recent occurrence of “the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) … [e]conomic distress, the Reformation and war” (1998:1-2). Perhaps the most sickening cause of the witch hunts is the financial viability thereof. As Ellerbe writes, “[b]y adding witchcraft to the crimes it persecuted … the Inquisition [the body which investigated accusations of heresy and witchcraft] exposed a … group of people from whom to collect money” (1995:4). Witch hunters generated money whenever they convicted a witch because, as Barbara Walker suggests, witches “were charged for the very ropes that bound them and the wood that burned them. Each procedure of torture carried its fee. After the execution of a wealthy witch, officials usually treated themselves to a banquet at the expense of the victim’s estate” (quoted in Ellerbe:4).

Harris would agree, writing as he does that

Expenses were kept down by forcing the witch’s family to pay the bill for the services of the torturers and the executioners. The family was also billed for the cost of the fagots and for the banquet which the judges held after the burning. Considerable enthusiasm for witch-hunting could be built up among local officials since they were empowered to confiscate the entire estate of any person condemned for witchcraft (1974:215).

According to many modern witchcraft practitioners, with all the burning of supposed witches which occurred in the ‘Burning Times’, any person – woman or man – who was, in fact, a pagan worshipper of pre-Christian gods and goddesses would have, in all probability, kept the secret of her or his religion hidden to avoid persecution. Catala Silvermoon writes in her The Burning Times website (1996), “[b]y the late seventeenth century, the followers who remained loyal to the Old Religion were in hiding and witchcraft had turned into a secret underground religion after … persons had been put to death … in the name of Christianity” (2). Another who agrees with Silvermoon is Starhawk who, in “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” (1992), asserts that pagan worshippers hid themselves “[t]hrough the dark ages of persecution” (261). She
also writes that “[m]emory of the true craft [witchcraft] faded everywhere except within the hidden covens” (262). Modern witchcraft practitioners like Starhawk and Silvermoon put forward the notion that Wicca, or modern witchcraft, can be traced back to prehistoric, ancient times. They generally propose that through persecution – such as that which occurred in the Great Hunt – those who worshipped pagan gods and goddesses were reduced in number and forced to practice in secrecy. Gerina Dunwich, in her A – Z of Wicca (1997), further explains how the Church appropriated pagan symbols and demonised them in order to facilitate conversion to Christianity. She writes, “with the advent of the Christian faith, the Catholic Church in their attempt to bastardize the Old Religion, took the image of the gentle and loving Horned God [the primary male divinity in Wicca], contaminated it with hellish attributes, and called it their Devil” (66). Jane-Anne Hobbes, in “Medicine Woman” (1997), provides an overview of this process:

far from being devil-worshipping cults, Wicca and other forms of contemporary witchcraft are surviving vestiges of ancient pre-Christian folk religions or fertility cults, which continued, over the centuries, to exist alongside Christianity albeit in secret. As Christianity gained ascendancy, those who practised the old religions began to be regarded as witches in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities; and their gods became branded as devils or demons (3).

This viewpoint is not supported by some scholars like Owen Davies who, in “Witchcraft” (1999), notes that “[t]here is absolutely no evidence in the modern historical record that those accused of witchcraft were pagan worshippers” and asserts that “[i]n the opinion of those who accused and assaulted them, witches were guilty of malice and spite, not of subversive religious practices” (5). Stephen Hayes’ article, “Christian Responses to Witchcraft and Sorcery” (1995), similarly suggests that “[w]hatever the witchcraft that was being suppressed in the Great Witch Hunt was, it was not a pagan religion” (3).
As with the issue of Goddess-worship, it is not the purpose of this chapter to establish the ‘truth’ of these opposing viewpoints. If, as many writers seem to suggest, what are known today as Wiccans are descendants of the witches who were tortured and executed in the ‘Burning Times’, then the Medieval and Renaissance roots of Wicca can be studied. If modern Wiccans are not descendants of those so-called witches, as writers like Hayes and Davies allege, then one can still uncover – as will be demonstrated shortly in this chapter – pagan roots for their beliefs. What does stand out, irrespective of the answer to this riddle, is that people – mostly women – were labelled witches and burnt at the stake for their alleged crimes. Even if there is not a direct line of descent from Renaissance ‘witches’ to modern Wiccans, the similarities which can be perceived between these groups can be studied in order in order to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon of witchcraft in its various forms.

Wicca has been defined as “[a]n alternative name for modern Witchcraft; a neo-Pagan Nature religion with spiritual roots in Shamanism …. The Goddess and the Horned God are the two main deities honored and worshipped in Wiccan rites” (Dunwich 1997:141). The Covenant of the Goddess website (2000) likewise asserts that Wicca and witchcraft are synonymous, also adding that Wicca is a very personal faith: “[o]ur religion is not a series of precepts or beliefs, rather we believe that we each have within ourselves the capacity to reach out and experience the mystery – that feeling of ineffable oneness with all Life” (3). Wicca is often eclectic, having been drawn from a variety of sources, many of which appear to be pagan. Hayes writes that such sources include “the cults of the pre-Christian deities of North-Western Europe, mainly Celtic deities such as Lugh and Dagdha, or Teutonic deities such as Odin or Thor” (1995:2). The Celtic roots of Wicca are revealed by the fact that the name “Wicca”
stems from the early Anglo-Saxon word “wicce”, which means “wise” (Encarta 2000:7, Hardie 2000:1). It is important to note, as Hayes does, that Wiccans are not Satanists as some believe and “are committed to being harmless” (1995:3). Hayes also makes mention of the Wiccan Rede, “An it harm none, do what thou wilt” (3) to support this contention. The Covenant of the Goddess website further indicates that magic is an integral part of being a witch and defines the types of magic which are practised by Wiccans which include:

- psychic healing sessions, the focus and direction of energy to achieve positive results, and work[ing] toward the individual spiritual development of the coven members. Magic is an art which requires adherence to certain principles, and a conscious direction of will toward the desired end (6).

The Encarta entry notes that neo-paganism is not merely paganism adopted. Although many of the concepts are imported, some are altered. The entry notes, for example, that Wicca shuns the common pagan practice of animal sacrifice (7).

Wicca is becoming an increasingly popular religion, particularly in the United Kingdom and in the United States (Hayes 1995:2). According to Titania Hardie, a self-confessed witch who was interviewed in the 23 July 2000 episode of Carte Blanche, paganism is the fastest growing religion in Britain. This religion is not only becoming popular with people on the fringe of society; it is increasingly being accepted in mainstream culture. The United States has, in fact, allowed groups of Wiccans to practice their religion openly and officially on at least five army bases (Gwynne 1999:59). S.C. Gwynne, in the article “I saluted a witch” (1999) reveals that, although the army has allowed the practice of Wicca, the community surrounding the Fort Hood army base, where this was first allowed, is largely not in favour of this dispensation. John Ratliff’s “Witch Hunt” (1999) also examines the Fort Hood Wiccans. His interview with a church leader in the community, Jack Harvey, reveals that the Wiccans are
perceived by some to be evil witches who “should be done away with” (3). Although Wicca and the practice of witchcraft are not entirely accepted in all spheres of society, they are becoming increasingly visible and popular as more Wiccans share with people what their religion entails.

As Hardie suggests, part of the reason for the prejudice many witches experience is their “own fault … [because they] went underground too much and the subject wasn’t really understood” (3). According to Hardie, part of her motivation as a witch is an attempt to dispel some of the negative images surrounding witchcraft. This is, perhaps, the most challenging task that modern Wicca faces, seeing that the word ‘witch’ often has such negative connotations. Some Wiccans have suggested that using “Wicca” instead of “witchcraft” and “Wiccans” instead of “witches” is preferable because they can then avoid the “taint” of such emotive words (Dunwich 1997:147). As Ronald Hutton asserts, “by identifying themselves with a very old stereotype of menace … modern pagans have drawn upon themselves a great deal of unnecessary suspicion, vituperation and victimization which they are perpetually trying to assuage” (quoted in Hayes 1995:2). The Covenant of the Goddess website disagrees with the practice of adopting new names to define old religions, suggesting that “[v]irtually every religion can look back into the dark corners of history and find a period when it was held in disrepute …. Just because a group was or is persecuted or maligned is not a reason for it to change its name” (2000:5). In fact, Hutton also notes that, although this term has such negative associations, “[t]he advantage of the label ‘witch’ is that it has all the exciting connotations of a figure who flouts the conventions of normal society and is possessed of powers unavailable to it, at once feared and persecuted” (quoted in Hayes:2).

Dunwich further notes that
many Witches are proud to be identified as Witches, and there are many feminist Witches who agree that reclaiming the word ‘Witch’ from the evil stigmas that have attached themselves to it over the centuries is one important way for magickal women to reclaim the power that once was, and rightfully is, theirs (147).

Just as many women appreciate the pro-female expression found in studies of Goddess-worship, so do many women enjoy the feminist undertones of Wicca. Khadija Maganlie’s article, “The Witches of Jo’burg” (1999), reveals that, because Wicca is orientated towards the veneration of Mother Earth, women as “the givers of life” are honoured too (1). Maganlie also indicates that “[w]hat fascinates many about paganism, particularly feminists, is the absence of any divinely sanctioned gender hierarchy” (1). The Covenant of the Goddess website similarly notes that “[m]any feminists have turned to Wicca and the role of [the] priestess for healing and strength after patriarchal oppression and lack of voice for women in the major world religions” (2000:8). Wicca it seems then, offers a religious experience which does not polarise; it offers a more integrated and holistic worldview which rejects binary thought. Mary Daly’s “After the Death of God the Father” (1992) criticises patriarchal oppression as is found in Christianity and Judaism because the androcentric focus of these religions disallows the expression of women’s voices. She writes,

> [t]he Judaic-Christian tradition has served to legitimate sexually imbalanced patriarchal society. Thus … the image of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting (54).

Wicca, then, may offer women who are dissatisfied with traditional religion an opportunity to experience themselves as spiritual beings because not only is the principle deity, the Goddess, female, but also women are welcome to take the role of leader in the religious organisation. It is noteworthy that since 1994 the Church of
England in the United Kingdom has ordained women priests but these women have not, generally speaking, enjoyed wholly positive experiences. The BBC News website indicates in an article, “Women Bishops Under Debate” (2000a), that “women priests in the UK feel they are discriminated against, bullied and intimidated. Some have received hate mail … and some threatened with rape” (1). Significantly, some of these women have been branded “witches” for wanting to be actively spiritual beings (1). Ironically, had these women chosen the Wiccan spiritual path, they would, literally, have been witches – but would probably have enjoyed far greater acceptance from their religious communities. Eleanor McLaughlin’s article “The Christian Past: Does It Hold a Future for Women?” (1992) reveals similar sentiments to those expressed by Daly. She writes,

[i]t is not surprising that women within the churches who seek a just voice and role in the traditionally male dominated, hierarchically organized Christian community have found in the history of the church a depressing litany of theological justifications for the oppressive customs of patriarchal societies, of misogyny and neglect intensified by theological images, and ecclesiastical structures and practices that reflected and reinforced the androcentric character of theological and secular definitions of human nature. The tradition seems to have been created by and interpreted by men (94).

In Africa, the concepts of witches and witchcraft are subtly different to the more First World understanding as espoused by Wiccans which has been examined in this chapter. Introduced into this equation is the witchdoctor, who can be distinguished from the witch. In African culture, a witch is generally believed to be a practitioner of dark arts, a dangerous person who commits evil. Robinson indicates that witches are believed to have the ability to “shape-shift”, can change themselves into zombies and can kill people – either through the use of poison or by “calling down lightning” (2000b:1).
The African definition of a witch therefore more closely resembles that of the 'Burning Times' than that of modern Wicca. As was found with the Great Hunt, there are many more women who are perceived to be witches than men. Friday M. Mbon in, "Women in African Traditional Religions" (1987), refers to "the central position they [i.e. women] occupy in the practice of witchcraft" (13, my emphasis). Mbon also writes of "its diabolical and destructive influence and the usually paralyzing fear it instils in the average African" (13). Interestingly, connections have been made between African women's experiencing oppressive patriarchy and their need to gain some form of control over their environments. Just as Meir Bar-Ilan connects Jewish and early Christian women with witchcraft as a means of legitimising themselves in an androcentric world, so can African women be said to seek such legitimisation through the practice of witchcraft. S.O. Jedo suggests explicitly that the primary reason that "many women are witches [is] partly to protect themselves against traditional male domination" (quoted in Mbon:13). One could, following Bar-Ilan's thinking, assert that African culture – led by its men – has demonised phenomena associated with women as a means of social control. However, while such claims seem attractive explanations for the association between women and witchcraft, they are difficult to either prove or disprove. These claims remain essentially speculative but are, nevertheless, important considerations which should be borne in mind when examining the 'evil' women and witchcraft pairing found in so many cultures.

Unofficial witch hunts are an increasing danger to those accused of witchcraft in South Africa. Robinson examines the extent of the problem, referring to a May 1996 report entitled "Commission of Enquiry into Witchcraft, Violence and Ritual Killings" which shows that "thousands of people [who have] been accused of witchcraft ... have
been run out of town and have lost their property” (2000b:1). The report also estimates that more than 300 people had been killed for being “witches” in the years 1986-1996 (1). As with the European Witch Craze, women have been the primary victims of the South African hunts (2). Daniel J. Wakin’s article, “Witchcraft deadly serious problem in South Africa” (1999) also examines the problem of witch hunts and notes that the Northern Province alone has recorded 600 such deaths since 1990 (1). Professor Thias Kgatla suggests that

[t]he causes of the violence are complicated. Poverty, ignorance, isolation, deep-rooted traditional beliefs and rebellion against authority under apartheid form the background …. On such fertile ground, a natural disaster or sudden death is easily blamed on sorcery, and a mob mentality takes over (quoted in Wakin:2).

As was noted by Edward Bever earlier in this chapter, stressors in a community can lead to stressed members in that community which can further lead to accusations of witchcraft (2000:5). Africa has its share of stressors, as is illustrated by Kgatla. It would appear that ‘crying witch’ has become an almost-legitimised way of releasing some of the stress built up in some regions. An examination of the BBC News website quickly illustrates how prevalent this phenomenon is, and how similar incidents of witch hunting are. A brief perusal of the articles reveals that in 1998, two elderly women were lynched by a Ghanaian mob who believed them responsible for the supernatural death of a meningitis patient; in 1999, a report revealed that thousands of Congolese children are being accused of witchcraft and are often murdered for their ‘sin’; in 1999, “three old women” were burned to death for being witches in the Eastern Cape; in 1999, an old Tanzanian woman barely escaped with her life after being accused of practising witchcraft; and in 2000, four women and one man were burned to death in India because their executors believed them to be witches (BBC 1998, Vine 1999, Evans 1999, BBC 1999, BBC 2000b). Such news reports illustrate how widespread the
phenomenon is, especially when one considers that BBC News, being a British concern, usually only reports on the more sensational crimes from over the world. The similarities between the cases are striking. Most of these crimes have women victims. Almost all of the victims are old, although notably the only other victims reported are children, who are also relatively vulnerable to victimisation. Death by burning is usually the chosen method of execution.

The South African Education Labyrinth (2000) website makes a connection between social intolerance and witch hunts, arguing that when stressors in a community become intolerable, those who are different to the norm in some way are more likely to be blamed. Also linked to witch hunts, the website argues, is superstition, a necessary feature for accusations of witchcraft to be believed. It further notes that both social intolerance and superstition exist in South Africa today, suggesting:

The necessary ingredients exist in today’s violence-racked villages in Kwa-Zulu Natal. It is noticeable that there is a steady rise in the number of executions of women in Kwa-Zulu Natal accused of being witches …. Social intolerance fuelled the great witch-craze of Early modern Europe. Unfortunately social intolerance is still very much a part of our life today. Social intolerance caused Apartheid. Social intolerance could destroy the new South Africa. Let us hope that we can learn something from the past (8).

Witchdoctors are also considered to be a group concerned with the metaphysical, but are clearly distinguished from witches, who are experienced as a danger to society. Witchdoctors – also known as sangomas or amagqirha – are those who use magical-type powers to help people. They fulfil the function of a medicine man who must “counter the power of evil witchcraft through good magic” (Encarta 2000:2). As Dunwich writes, a witchdoctor is “a practitioner of magick who uses spells and charms to cure the ill and exorcise evil spirits from possessed persons and places” (1997:148-9). She also notes that witchdoctors occur in many places all over the world:
“Africa, Australia, Central America, Melanesia, Polynesia and South America” (148). The article, “Witchdoctors to be given medical licenses in South Africa” (1998) notes that sangomas are widely consulted in South Africa today, with as much as 80% of the country’s population visiting such a figure at some point in their lives. In fact, Hayes notes that many African people believe that sangomas have the ability to cure certain diseases – collectively known as “isiko sabantu” – which Western medicine cannot (1995:5).

Shirley Thorpe’s “Woman and Power in African Traditional Religions” (1996) notes that witchdoctors are “most frequently” women and further suggests that in traditional Africa, generally speaking, “men were political authorities … [while] women [were the] spiritual authorities” (86) Thorpe writes that the process of becoming a sangoma is a complex one, which begins when the chosen person’s ancestors make it known that she/he is to become a witchdoctor. The person experiences strange visions or dreams and acts “as one deranged” (87). When the person accepts that she/he is to become a sangoma, an experienced witchdoctor takes her/him on as an apprentice. After the trainee witchdoctor has completed the training – which takes at least a year – she/he is qualified to act as a sangoma in a community (87). Mensah Oséi also notes in “Women in Transition” (1996) that women outnumber men in the traditional healing profession, suggesting that women are regarded as more “mystical” than men and so are considered more suitable for the role of spiritual leader (104). She further writes “[i]t is interesting to note that even with the advent of Christianity, urbanisation and Western education, the position and authority of female traditional healers has (sic) not been negated” (104-5).
There are different, if related, concerns being discussed in this chapter. The first is that of women’s connection to witchcraft and the attack on women as witches, who are perceived to be the source of evil in society. Both the European witch hunt and the contemporary African witch hunts follow this pattern. In these instances, one can judge the execution of these victims as a form of control exercised over women since even though a few men are killed, the vast majority of the ‘witches’ are women. The second issue is that of organised religion’s perceived betrayal of women and the resultant rejection of these religions which some women express. These women can be seen as victims of the intolerance experienced in such religions and many of these women turn to alternative forms of religion – such as Wicca – in order to experience themselves as spiritual beings. In both cases, women are routinely denied selfhood and are either branded ‘witches’ and executed, or they can take on the title of ‘witch’ as a means of defying patriarchy. It is surely not a coincidence that Wiccans call themselves witches, even if their roots are not actually found in the Medieval witch burnings. The term ‘witch’, as maligned as it seems, stands in defiance of male authority and, as such, is a potential symbol for strength for women.

Both Anne Landsman and Njabulo S. Ndebele have portrayed South African versions of witches in fiction. These witches are perceived to have specific powers unavailable to others and are treated with a certain degree of awe. Nomsa, in The Devil’s Chimney (1997) by Landsman, and the eponymous prophetess in Ndebele’s short story (1994) will be examined as South African variations of the old theme of witches.

Janette Turner Hospital’s article “The Abyss of the Past” (1998) points out that Landsman’s novel incorporates three different time periods:
the turn of the century [i.e. 1900] when ostrich feathers were the pinnacle of fashion … and white ostrich farmers … lived like kings with black slave labor …; the 1950s when there is no more money to be made from ostrich plumes, but racial hierarchies have been rigged …; and finally, the present: the new South Africa of Mandela (11-12).

Nomsa only occurs in the first of these timelines although her presence in this period reverberates through the latter two. All of the sources which deal with the differences between witches and witchdoctors thus far in this chapter have tended to label the former as evil and the latter as unequivocally good. In Landsman’s characterisation of Nomsa, however, the dividing line between the two is somewhat ‘blurred’ because Nomsa seems to possess both a dangerous, potentially evil side as well as virtuous and positive aspects. She thus embodies both a witch’s and a witchdoctor’s characteristics.

Connie, the protagonist, highlights this dichotomy when she first introduces Nomsa, saying, “[p]eople say Nomsa was a witch or a witch doctor or whatever it is they call those women who throw bones and make small fires” (15-16). It is noteworthy that Connie does not allow for men to be either witches or witchdoctors and so it seems that only women are accredited with supernatural ability. Her ability to “make special muti” (16) is brought to the fore almost as soon as Nomsa enters the text. The purposes of her muti are both good and evil, because it can “make people fall in love, or die” (16). It seems that Nomsa combines the roles of witch and witchdoctor because of the morally ambiguous medicines she makes, which consists of numerous strange ingredients, including roots (249), ostrich toe-nails and dog hair (41) and small, dead animals like dassies and meerkats (162). As one would expect from a witch(doctor), her appearance is strange and Connie describes her as having “a small face …. She looked like one of those dried monkeys you see in muti shops hanging upside down from the ceiling” (23).
She also comes from a long line of witch (doctors), having “got her bones from her ouma, who got her bones from her ouma” (185).

Nomsa’s supernatural dealings with Miss Beatrice are mostly beneficial because she seems to help her mistress to cope with her various problems and lusts by making muti for her. Although Miss Beatrice accepts Nomsa’s help – and, indeed, at times requires it – Mr Henry does not. Instead of seeking assistance from her, he prevents her from throwing her bones “near the house” (185). It is, perhaps, significant that Nomsa’s single definitive act of evil occurs after Mr Henry has killed her partner, September. When he does so, she curses him: “Nomsa looked at Mr Henry and … her shadow fell across the cart filled with feathers [that he was taking to sell and] … it fell across Mr Henry’s face, and the heads of the horses …. [T]hat shadow hung over them and darkened them” (208). The results of the curse are profound – not only is Mr Henry unable to sell the feathers because of the collapse of the ostrich feather market, but he is, in fact, killed by two ostriches when he returns to the farm. His death is not pleasant – he bleeds to death even as he tries to hold his intestines inside his torn-open belly (231).

Racial inequality acts as a backdrop for Nomsa and Miss Beatrice’s relationship. Although it is Nomsa who has innate power, Miss Beatrice, as the white, English woman, is the ‘madam’ who enjoys societal power and prestige. Connie unwittingly comments on the constraints such societal roles as ‘madam’ place on people when she tells that Miss Beatrice is afraid of Nomsa but

> [o]f course nobody said anything because you can’t say things like that to your maid. You can’t just say what you’re worried about. You can’t even say what’s wrong? You must go on being the madam and asking about supper and what’s in the pots (130).
As Kate Moses suggests in her “Review of The Devil’s Chimney” (2000), Connie, who is “a middle-aged alcoholic” has a limited perspective, being “crippled by loss, racism and cultural fear” (1-2). Although Moses believes that Landsman erred in choosing Connie as her narrator because of this limited perspective, she has not taken into account how just this perspective can act as a commentary on such narrow thinking. The reader is invited to critique Connie’s way of thinking and, through this, to critique the racist attitudes that are foregrounded in the novel. According to Connie, then, Nomsa is inferior because she is black and Miss Beatrice – although still mostly admirable – is tainted by her association with the Xhosa woman. Connie suggests that “Nomsa gave her … muti and she got much better. But I think on the inside she went black, like a kaffir” (43). It is worth noting that Landsman undermines her protagonist’s perception of Nomsa as inferior by making this character arguably the strongest of all the characters in the novel and showing her to be one who can effect change and who influences others. She is, for example, described as having “a needle in her look” and Miss Beatrice is afraid of her when she thinks she sees “a crack of lightning between Nomsa’s teeth” (130). It is she who curses Mr Henry and causes his death and her various mutis are said to cure Miss Beatrice’s illnesses. To varying degrees the other characters are shown to be relatively ineffective and weak. Only Miss Beatrice approaches Nomsa in terms of making an impact on other characters. Significantly, both Miss Beatrice and Nomsa are, at different times in the novel, shown to be independent, self-pleasing women. Both women also suffer because of the low societal opinion of them and societal pressure to conform. Like Nomsa, Miss Beatrice is called a witch and she is blamed for the crash of the ostrich feather market: “everybody said at the time that she was the one whose fault it was …. Daardie vrou, they said. Sy is ‘n
That woman is a witch" (246). Also, Connie says, “[t]he white people blamed Miss Beatrice for the feather collapse and some of the volkies thought it was Nomsa and her muti who had killed the child of the father out of spite. Nobody wanted to see them again” (167).

As is common in perceptions of witches, Nomsa is characterised as a sexual being and the power of her sexuality has a profound impact on Miss Beatrice, possibly indirectly resulting in her mistress’s falling pregnant by September. Landsman’s description of the menage a trois between September, Nomsa and Miss Beatrice is a sexually charged piece of writing in which Nomsa, although neither the impregnator nor the impregnatee, plays an active role. In fact, Connie suggests that Nomsa might have instigated the incident by asking “[d]id Nomsa throw in some muti to make Miss Beatrice go mad? So mad her legs were burning in their sockets?” (88). Nomsa shows some of the wisdom of the witchdoctor when she takes Precious, the daughter of Miss Beatrice and September, away from her mistress and carries her off to live with her grandmother. Even though she almost destroys Miss Beatrice in doing this, the child – who closely resembles September – is taken away before she can experience the racism which would undoubtedly be directed at her as a mixed-race child of a white woman. As Hospital writes, “[a] black baby born to a white woman exacts fearsome penalties for all concerned” (1998:3). Nomsa reduces the “fearsome penalties” which Precious must bear by removing her from the hierarchically rigid white world and placing her in the less rigid world of people of colour where she would be one of many so-called Coloured people.

In many ways Ndebele’s prophetess can be seen to resemble Landsman’s Nomsa even though these characters are the creations of very different authors and
occur in texts of differing genres. Although neither character is the protagonist, both have a profound influence on those around them. Like Nomsa, the unnamed prophetess cannot be clearly labelled as good or evil, as a witchdoctor or a witch. The prophetess is regarded by the narrator – a young boy – as a dangerous figure who could curse him if he annoyed her or even “send lightning after [him]” (1994:11). Yet, even as he considers her to be dangerous and to possess of witch-like characteristics, he also has belief in her healing powers and thinks that if “[s]he would … lay her hands on the bottle and pray … the water would have curing powers” (11). In this text one can consider the prophetess to be a Christianised witchdoctor because she possesses many of a witchdoctor’s characteristics – such as healing and service to the community – and is considered to be a herbalist too even as she worships Jesus Christ and sings Christian hymns. It is not only the boy who contemplates these dual aspects of the prophetess. He describes travelling on a bus, listening to adult members of his community discussing this witch(doctor) figure. Most of these adults believe that the prophetess uses magic to set traps for those who would steal her “velvety, black, and juicy grapes” (13) and believe that those who are disrespectful of her should fear death by lightning (15). The prophetess is also depicted in an almost divine light when the narrator tells of her releasing would-be grape thieves:

They would be glued there to the vine, and would be moaning for forgiveness throughout the cold night, until the morning, when the prophetess would come out of the house with the first rays of the sun, raise her arms into the air, and say: ‘Away, away, sinful man; go and sin no more!’ Suddenly the thief would be free, and would walk away feeling a great release that turned him into a new man (13).

The prophetess’s source of power lies in Jesus Christ, as is made clear by the bamboo cross on her wall as well as the “picture of Jesus in which His chest was open, revealing His heart which had many shafts of light radiating from it” (17-18). She prays to the
cross and sings a hymn, further concretising her characteristics as a healer. She also, however, has hanging on another wall “a huge mask .... It was shining and black. It grinned all the time showing two canine teeth pointing upwards” (17). This demonic image is at odds with her Christian appearance and is more in keeping with a witch’s paraphernalia.

Again, like Nomsa, the prophetess is strange looking, with “protruding” thick lips, “wrinkled skin” and caved-in cheeks. She also has “a line tattooed from the forehead to the ridge of … [her] nose” (1994:17). She also, at times, acts in a strange manner, scaring the boy with her lunatic laughter:

It began as a giggle …. The giggle broke into the kind of laughter that produced tears when one was very happy …. But the laugh gave way to a long shriek. The boy wanted to rush out of the house. But something strong, yet intangible, held him fast to where he was. It was probably the shriek itself that had filled the dark room and now seemed to come out of the mask on the wall (19).

Even though the boy is afraid during his time with the prophetess, he never doubts that she can assist him by making his bottle of water 'holy'. This fear is more commonly associated with witches while this confidence in her healing ability is associated with witchdoctors or healers, once again making it difficult to classify the prophetess.

Despite his ambivalent experience with the woman, the boy leaves her house feeling protected by “the spirit of the prophetess” (1994:21) and further describes himself as feeling “strangely superior” (23) to his peers because of his interaction with her. It seems that the prophetess’s gift to him is not the holy water which he gets from her, but the feeling of self-worth and insight which he carries with him. When the bottle containing the blessed water is broken, he sees that replacing the 'holy' water with ordinary water is not a sin because he can still 'heal' his mother by being around her, helping her and being a good son (27).
All the sources dealt with in this chapter insist that witches and witchdoctors are separate phenomena. Although both make use of some form of supernatural power, the uses to which they put the power are distinct: witches do evil, while witchdoctors do good. These divisions do not hold true for either “The prophetess” or The Devil’s Chimney where Ndebele and Landsman’s characterisations of the witch(doctor) figures are not definite. These women have both witches’ and witchdoctors’ characteristics since, while they mostly seem to do good, their potential for evil is also expressed. One can speculate that the prophetess would be blamed for any great misfortune in her community – as Miss Beatrice was for the collapse of the ostrich feather market. Following Meir Bar-Ilan’s thinking, it can be suggested that Nomsa and the prophetess have taken power for themselves because they have been denied legitimate positions of authority in a white, male world. Because they embrace this supernatural power, they create room to speak out and to be spiritual beings and so legitimise themselves in a world which would disempower them. In taking power for themselves in a male- and white-dominated world, these women – who are usually seen as witchdoctors because of their healing ability – are also regarded with suspicion and awe and considered to have something of the witch in them because they are powerful women.
Sinéad Marie Bernadette O’Connor is one of rock music’s most enigmatic figures. Her music career has spanned thirteen years, from the release of her debut album, The Lion and The Cobra in 1987, when she was twenty, to her 2000 offering Faith and Courage. She is a controversial figure who has experienced widely differing responses to her music and to herself as a singer, ranging from a cult-like following to dismissal of the importance of her music. Likewise, she has both been hailed as a feminist and derided for her outspoken commentary on male-female relations. She provides an interesting continuation of the issues raised in chapter two from several perspectives. Her views on the nature of God and spirituality make her a prime candidate for a continuation of the discussion on women’s experiences of religion which was raised previously and, because of her outspoken, even brash, nature, there is a strong possibility that she would have been burned as a witch had she been born in less fortunate times. Based on what can be discovered from numerous articles about and interviews with O’Connor, one can perceive a strong link between the content of her songs and the avowed concerns of this singer\(^1\). The lyrics to her various songs will therefore be examined in an attempt to discover something of her feminist, alternative worldview. The relevant lyrics have been included as an addendum and references to the songs include line numbers. This chapter will attempt to illustrate, with the aid of several examples, how

\(^1\) Many of the newspaper articles referred to in this chapter can be located in the Sinéad O’Connor archive at [www.members.tripod.com/dcebe/](http://www.members.tripod.com/dcebe/). Since the original page numbers on which the articles appeared are not available, they have only been referenced by author and date.
O’Connor has offered challenge to authority figures of all kinds. In this way, she is the descendant of the witch in the sense that, like witches who were often perceived to be a threat to society because of their contrary behaviour and supposed evil deeds, O’Connor is threatening to many. Like the witches of old, she too has suffered for being different. In addition, she can be likened to the figure of the white witch because of her concern for people’s healing – albeit it in a more spiritual than physical sense. While O’Connor is undoubtedly the descendant of the concept of a witch, she is not necessarily literally a witch in the modern Wiccan sense of the word – although she does nevertheless manifest some Wiccan characteristics. O’Connor further provides an interesting continuation of the discussion of Cixous’ binary oppositions, being one who deliberately and consciously overturns such oppositions. Not only does she, at times, claim the masculine side of the attributes for herself, but she also attempts to re-value the so-called ‘feminine’ aspect so that it is no longer the undermined attribute.

A brief outline of O’Connor’s life can be gained from Daniel Durchholz’s description of her experiences in the *Wall of Sound* website (2000), as well as from O’Connor’s letter to *The Irish Times* which outlines her childhood in Dublin (1993a). She is the third of four children of Sean and Marie O’Connor. After her parents separated when she was nine years old, she moved between living with her mother, whom O’Connor has subsequently accused of severe child abuse, and her father. She was largely an unsuccessful scholar, being sent to a school for children with behavioural problems at the age of fourteen. After leaving school, she supported herself by singing at weddings and in coffee shops where she was identified as a talent by U2’s guitarist, The Edge. Subsequent voice training led to the release of the acclaimed *The Lion and The Cobra* in 1987. This album was followed in 1990 by *I Do Not Want What I Haven’t*
Got. The media’s response to O’Connor’s outspokenness and provocative behaviour led to a short-lived retirement from the music industry around this period. Her next offering, rather than being self-penned, was Am I Not Your Girl? (1992), an album of cover versions of older blues- and jazz-type songs. Universal Mother, which was released in 1994, is a collection loosely based around the concept of motherhood. O’Connor also released a mini-album, Gospel Oak, in 1997. Her latest release, Faith and Courage (2000), brings to date the offerings of this Irish singer.

Just as a Medieval witch was thought to upset the status quo so has O’Connor often challenged ‘the way things are.’ She has always been outspoken, given to loud expression of her views irrespective of who she might offend – and she has often offended people. As Durchholz indicates, she has, in fact, been referred to as “a lightning rod for trouble” (2000:1). Mike Ross writes, in an article appropriately entitled “O’Connor! Oh My!” (1997), that her outspokenness has led her to rip up a picture of the Pope on television, to shave her head as a statement against stifling stereotypical patterns imposed on women, and to declare that money should be eliminated from society. According to William Leith’s article “The Life of Saint Sinéad” (1992), O’Connor has, at various times, had her songs banned from certain radio stations’ playlists, been arrested for attempting to storm the Irish parliament, been slated for declaring her support of Suddam Hussein when the Gulf War was developing and has been offered to “to have her ass kicked” by Frank Sinatra for refusing to have the American national anthem played at one of her concerts.

John Maybury suggests that the reason for O’Connor’s controversial behaviour lies in her refusal “to make the private/public distinction” (quoted in Leith 1992). Because she does not make this distinction, which is arguably present in all successful
performers, she has no qualms about expressing her private thoughts in a public manner and, indeed, insists that her private musings are heard. Given that ‘private’ is usually equated with ‘woman’ and ‘public’ with ‘man’ (Cixous 1989:110), O'Connor here appropriates the so-called masculine domain when she shares her private thoughts. Maybury continues, reinforcing his thoughts, “she doesn’t have what a friend of mine calls ‘falsity’”. Robert O'Byrne, in his review of Universal Mother, “Sinéad’s New Offering Gets Mixed Reviews” (1994), also alludes to this public/private distinction when he writes that O'Connor “refuses to separate her creative life from her personal life” and further adds that the way in which a listener feels about O'Connor as a person influences how that listener will respond to her music – which has potentially negative implications for the record sales of a singer of O'Connor’s notoriety. O'Connor’s perceived transgression in subverting society’s binary oppositions could, arguably, in part explain her notoriety; she makes people uncomfortable when she overturns the societally-defined perceptions that are informed by binary oppositions. In fact, O’Connor, by challenging people’s perceptions in this way, makes it difficult for people to ‘hear’ her precisely because her message overturns their ways of perceiving society.

One must not underestimate the negative impact of what this singer says even while acknowledging the fact that she troubles people merely by speaking out in a ‘male’ manner. She has, for example, said, “I believe the Catholic Church wants children to be abused, that's why they want to ban abortion because, unless we're being abused, they don't have any power” (quoted in Rosenfield 1992) and “I despise the music industry …. I despise its values and I’m sick of artists sitting on their arses” (quoted in Leith 1992). Ann Powers suggests that “[h]er rhetoric derails her message, and makes it hard to hear her music” in “Divas and B-Girls” from The Rolling Stone
Book of Women in Rock (1997:379). Some critics have seen O'Connor's tendency to make outrageous comments as a way of achieving cheap publicity and have suggested that this is her only motivation (Durchholz 1992; Leith 1992; O'Kane 1993). On the other hand, Jon Pareles, in an article “Why Sinéad O'Connor Hit a Nerve” (1992), points out that it does not always benefit the singer to speak her mind as she does and notes that “[s]he has achieved wide recognition, though notoriety doesn’t seem likely to pay off for her. Even her most ardent fans are likely to be disgusted by some of her statements”. Pareles further suggests that O’Connor expresses herself honestly – if in an unfortunate manner sometimes – when she shares her outrageous thoughts in public. He writes, “[y]et for all O’Connor’s sincerity – and I don’t doubt that she means everything she blurts – she also has superb opportunistic reflexes; she hits nerves almost despite herself”. Cixous, who defines the public arena as ‘male’, describes the consequences for a woman (who should ‘naturally’ keep herself and her thoughts private) if she speaks out in public:

> Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking – even just opening her mouth – in public is something rash, a transgression. A double anguish, for even if she transgresses, her word almost always falls on the deaf, masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine (1989:110).

Described in Cixous’ terms, one can understand something of what O’Connor has experienced in the public arena, being a woman in a man’s world, and can also perhaps understand why she has often been unable to express herself clearly.

O’Connor is not an easy figure to pin down. Although she is outspoken and prepared to share her ideas, they are sometimes contradictory or even occasionally garbled. The reasons she has given for shaving her head, for example, have varied
widely. Greg Quill in his article “Singer’s Music Speaks for Her” (1988) indicates that O’Connor has suggested that she wants to avoid being manipulated as a sex-object. In this case, he writes shaving acts “as a form of protest against the female-as-object mentality of the music industry”; while she has also confessed, “I shaved my head because I was an angry screwed up child. It was an expression of my anger” (quoted in O’Kane 1993). It is therefore sometimes somewhat difficult to comprehend O’Connor’s standpoints since she is not always consistent. Powers comments on the difficulty which lies in attempting to classify O’Connor:

In the beginning, she was an enfant terrible who didn’t even fit that role properly, because at twenty-one she was also mother to a newborn baby boy. Later she became a leftist radical with no clear political base, and a musical eccentric who fit no genre comfortably, especially not rock and roll (1997:376).

Even as it becomes clear that one cannot confine O’Connor to a box – either as a woman or as an artist – it also emerges that she has a profound influence on music.

The All Music Guide website (2000) notes that she has been ranked among the most distinctive and controversial pop stars of the 1990s …. Brash and outspoken, … O’Connor irrevocably altered the image of women in rock; … she kick-started a revolt which led the way for performers ranging from … Courtney Love to Alanis Morrisette (1).

The Unofficial Sinéad O’Connor website (2000) biography of the singer highlights her distinctive nature, describing how, when O’Connor released her first album and performed at the Grammy Awards, she looked “[b]ald-headed and fierce-looking among the wide-smiled moussed stars …. [S]he was miles ahead of everybody else. [S]he … upset the status quo, and nobody knew quite what to do with her” (4). Pareles tackles the issue of why O’Connor, in a world of headline-making excesses, consistently manages to make news of herself. The singer, he writes, “has a gift that’s increasingly rare: the ability to stir full-fledged outrage. She has stumbled onto the 1990’s taboo:
taking on an authority figure” (1992). Pareles suggests that challenge from groups on the fringes of power in society – like “insubordinate blacks … or women” – is likely to “draw … real outrage” because such groups don’t know their “place” and so challenge the status quo. O’Connor, according to Pareles then, is outrageous because she tackles issues beyond the normally-defined limits of a woman rock star as defined by society. Powers would agree with Pareles, arguing as she does that O’Connor is “transgressive, but not in the ways that [people] … like women to be” (1997:380). According to Powers, “people hate Sinéad O’Connor because she makes them nervous. She acts and speaks undiplomatically again and again” (379, my emphasis).

In an interview with Blue Jean magazine, “Paddy With Attitude” (1992), O’Connor reveals that she is aware of how her gender and appearance have counted against her in the music industry: “They can’t put me into a category and this is driving them crazy …. [so] people are afraid to listen to me” (4).

O’Connor’s tackling of out-of-bounds issues occurs both in her behaviour as an outspoken woman and in the lyrics of her songs. In “Black Boys on Mopeds”, from I Do Not Want What I Haven’t Got, O’Connor challenges not only the entire British police force, but also then-prime minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher. The song was, according to the Unofficial Sinéad O’Connor website, inspired by an apparently racial incident in which a young black man, Nicholas Bramble, was chased by police who thought he had stolen the moped on which he was travelling. The young man – who actually did own the moped – attempted to escape from the police and was killed when he crashed his vehicle. The website notes that “[a]lthough an inquiry absolved the police of wrongdoing and the accident was technically caused by Bramble’s own mistake, [his] … was a death that would have been inconceivable without the malevolent intervention
of the authorities” (2000:8). O’Connor sings, “England’s not the mythical land of Madame George and roses / It’s the home of police who kill black boys on mopeds” (ll. 9-10) and also:

Margareth [sic] Thatcher on TV
Shocked by the deaths that took place in Beijing
It seems strange that she should be offended
The same orders are given by her” (ll 1-4).

In this song, O’Connor clearly identifies Thatcher – who is linked to an oppressive Chinese regime – and the police force as guilty parties, thus challenging two prominent centres of British power. She again takes on Britain in “‘Famine’” from Universal Mother. She believes that the 1847 Irish famine, in which a great many Irish people starved to death, did not occur as history books tell – hence the double set of inverted commas around the title of this rap song. O’Connor argues in an interview, “Faith and Music” (1993b), with a British television station, ITV, that “[t]o this day, Irish children will be taught in their history books that there was a famine in this country when in fact there was never a famine …, there was a potato blight …. All the other food … [was] shipped out of the country under armed guard while the Irish people were starving to death” (2).

In this song O’Connor further links Ireland’s current problems with forms of “self-destruction [like] alcoholism [and] drug addiction” (ll. 18-19) to this country’s terrible experiences at Britain’s hands during the potato blight. According to O’Connor, Britain did not only systematically starve the Irish by taking all their food, it also attempted to use the Irish people’s hunger to eliminate Irish schools and the speaking of Irish (2). In an album review entitled “Two Sides of Sinéad in Universal Mother” (1994), Chris Willman notes that, in standing up against accepted notions of history in general and against Britain in particular, O’Connor shows great courage and shows herself to be “the Sinéad so many love to hate”. Like Alice Walker, whose The Temple of My
Familiar writes back against a colonising attitude which places the West at the centre of civilisation and culture, O’Connor speaks back against all who would attempt to colonise her, her people or – for that matter – any other group. She challenges conventional notions of history, society’s understanding of authority and power and regularly decentres the logocentrism prevalent in white, androcentric thinking.

O’Connor also espouses feminist thinking, thus challenging the deeply entrenched patriarchal values found in society and – again – offending some people. In Lynne Franks’ “Interview with Sinéad O’Connor” (1995), the singer shares her views on what women want for the future:

women want to be adequately represented in government, in churches, in education, within the media, within industry. When we say ‘adequately’, we want it understood that we mean equally …. We want to be allowed to make decisions and choices about our destinies …. We want other people to stop making those choices for us. We want to be allowed to control our own lives. We want to be paid equally to men. (1).

In “The Pluck of the Irish” (1988), Richard Cromelin reveals that such straight talk has earned her a reputation as “an outspoken, independent woman who won’t take any guff”, an image enhanced by her shaved head and tendency to wear baggy clothing. As the All Music Guide website notes, “her shaven head, angry visage and shapeless wardrobe [are] a direct challenge to … popular culture’s long-prevailing notions of femininity and sexuality” (2000:1). O’Connor’s alternative look is not only different to a ‘normal’ appearance, it also acts as a challenge to the very definition of what constitutes normality. In “Out on a Limb, Shouting” (1988), Jon Pareles notes that O’Connor has subverted the concept of what is acceptable for women: “Ms O’Connor defies rock’s usual roles for women – as flirt, sensitive soul, tough gal, one of the boys – by claiming and transforming all of them”. She achieves this by – amongst other things – refusing to
adopt the ‘appropriate’ attributes of a woman as defined by binary oppositions and instead taking from so-called male characteristics those which she chooses.

O’Connor does not appreciate patriarchy and what men in power have done to society, a fact revealed by her inclusion of a Germaine Greer speech at the start of Universal Mother. The speech includes the idea that “women could make politics irrelevant” by casting aside patriarchy’s “hierarchical pattern” and introducing “fraternity” or “subtle forms of interrelation” in its place. The speech ends, “it’s women who are going to have to break the spiral of power and find the trick of cooperation.” Although some critics have found the “matriarchy-deifying tone … [to] be a bit much for … non-womyn” (Willman 1994), O’Connor has persisted in defying patriarchy – both with the lyrics of her songs and her unconventional clothing. J. Bloomroden, in a US Music Vault website review of Faith and Courage (2000), suggests that in “No Man’s Woman”, O’Connor “is becoming a woman in her own right, no longer depending on someone else for validation” (1), thus reinforcing that this singer has continued to grow in her attack on patriarchal institutions.

Arguably O’Connor’s biggest – and most visible – challenge to authority occurred during the now-notorious episode of America’s “Saturday Night Live” (SNL) television show, where she tore up a picture of Pope John Paul II. The Pope is not only a symbol of the Catholic Church, but is also a symbol for God Himself and – even for those who are not practising Catholics – an image of authority and patriarchal power. Thus was O’Connor’s action not only anti-Catholic but also a challenge to many aspects of patriarchal society. John Carmody’s article “Singer Stuns ‘SNL’ Viewers” (1992) describes the incident: “After she intoned [‘War’ by Bob Marley] … O’Connor, 26, wearing a long white lace dress, very close-cropped hair, a nose stud and a silver
necklace with a Star of David, held up a color photo of the Pope, began tearing it and said, ‘Fight the real enemy’

O’Connor has subsequently revealed that her deviation from the planned SNL routine (she was to have sung “Scarlet Ribbons” and held up a picture of a starving child to the camera) was not premeditated but a spontaneous, last-minute decision. “War” includes the lines “[u]ntil the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned everywhere is war …. Until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes, I’ve got to say war” (quoted in Carmody). Through Marley’s words, which were in fact originally accredited to Marcus Garvey, O’Connor thus calls for an end to binaries of inequality between races, which reveals something of her affiliation for marginalised groups and her willingness to overturn hierarchical thinking. This photo-tearing incident launched O’Connor into a storm of controversy and she became an object of vilification by a great many – but it did also bring her into the spotlight where she was able to voice her anger at the Catholic Church. O’Connor argues that most religions have not served humankind well, although she particularly seems to detest Catholicism. Robert Hilburn’s “Sinéad O’Connor Offers Softer Songs” (1992) quotes her claim that “[o]ur spiritual leaders have lied to us and deliberately orchestrated it so we will grow in fear. Even if you don’t practise Catholicism, all the rules by which we live have been passed down for centuries by them [Catholic authorities]”. One of O’Connor’s most scathing attacks on the Church occurs in an untitled ‘poem’ at the end of Am I Not Your Girl?, where she suggests that Catholic leaders had Jesus Christ assassinated because of his subversive activities. She claims, “Look at the one wearing the collar / Then and now – there’s only ever been one liar / And it’s the holy roman empire” (ll. 18-20). Franks’ interview with O’Connor further reveals that the
singer slams most religious leaders, saying, “Stop all this nonsense about God being a man …. [W]hich one of you ever saw God? Not one, or you would not be here to tell the tale” (1995:1). She has also voiced her dissatisfaction with the experience of women in the Church:

Women feel that you [religious leaders] have not represented God accurately. In our understanding, God is simply the principle of unconditional love. What women want is not to be shut out any longer. Religious hierarchy, you no longer – and never did have – the right to keep us from ministering to the needs of humanity as mother figures, sacred as you …. What we want, [as] women of the world, is for patriarchy to get out of our way (1-2).

It is ironic, then, given O’Connor’s vehemently anti-Catholic stance in the early 1990s, that in 1999 she took vows as a Catholic priest, providing yet another challenge to patriarchal law by appropriating a man’s position. A Wall of Sound website article, “Sinéad Becomes Ordained Priest” (1999) indicates that Bishop Michael Cox, of the Latin Tridentine Church – which broke away from the mainstream Church a number of years ago – ordained O’Connor, who took the name Mother Bernadette Mary (1). David Sprague, in “Sinéad Gets Promoted” (2000), writes that her work amongst Dublin’s homeless people earned the singer the title of Archdeacon within twelve months (1). This seemingly out of character behaviour is put into context when O’Connor explains

[i]f you’re going to put yourself in the position of criticizing something, then you must feel that you can do a better job …. Well, if you feel you could do a better job, then join the organization and do what you can to change it. I do not believe in … throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There are things that need to be cleaned out within the church, but underneath all of that there’s a beautiful baby, this beautiful truth (quoted in Sprague:3).

Even though O’Connor has embraced the role of priest, the Church does not recognise her ordination since Catholicism does not allow for women priests. Also, as Christopher John Farley’s article “Sinéad Keeps the Faith” (2000) explains, the splinter sect to which
O’Connor belongs is not recognised by the Church, so she “hasn’t quite joined mainstream Catholicism”.

O’Connor’s express attempt to change the Catholic Church can be linked to another ‘crime’ of which she considers this institution guilty: that of ignoring, even at times promoting, child abuse. The singer has publicly accused her now-deceased mother of the emotional and physical abuse of her and her three siblings and has further linked this abuse directly to the pernicious effect that Catholicism has had on her people. According to O’Connor, the British – who acted on orders from the Catholic Church – denied the Irish people their roots and culture and this has resulted in a downward spiral of violence and abuse in Ireland. She asserts, “[t]he cause of my abuse is the history of my people, whose identity and culture were taken away from them by the British with the full permission of the ‘Holy’ Roman Empire. Child abuse is the highest manifestation of evil. It is the root and effect of every addiction” (quoted in Leith 1992). She also writes,

I really believe that when you take people away from the truth of their history you’re not allowing – like we weren’t allowed to be Irish, just as I would compare Ireland to an abused child, just as the child wasn’t allowed to be a child the people weren’t allowed to be Irish (1993b:2).

O’Connor describes the abuse her mother inflicted on her in an interview with Paul Watkins, entitled “Sinéad O’Connor Unbound” (1994): “I remember lying naked on the floor while my mother jumped up and down on my womb. She said, ‘I’m going to burst you’”. She has also described the effect that living with such abuse had on her self-esteem: “I was brought up to hate myself by someone who hated me and I was taught to hate myself …. We got into the pattern of thinking that we were nothing because we were made to say that we were nothing. If you hear it enough times, you believe it” (quoted in Durchholz 2000:2). Joseph O’Connor, the singer’s brother, has indicated
that this abuse did occur in his letter to *The Irish Times* (1993): “My mother was a deeply unhappy and disturbed person and her relationship with Sinéad and the rest of us disintegrated in time into extreme and violent abuse, both emotional and physical” (1993:1).

It is, perhaps, significant that music reviewers have sometimes been unable to decide whether “Fire on Babylon” from *Universal Mother* is an attack on the Catholic Church or on O’Connor’s abusive mother (Watkins 1994). The song features such lines as “all along she gave me lies / Just to make me think I loved her” (ll. 13-14) and “Look what she did to her son” (l. 17). Although much of this song can be interpreted as an anti-Catholic statement, Steve Morse’s untitled review (1994) indicates that the song’s “video … makes it clear it’s about her mother. It shows a young child clutching a doll, while freezing in absolute terror of her mother”. In his “Review of *Universal Mother*” (1994), David Sinclair writes that the anguish O’Connor felt – and still feels – over the abuse is conveyed through “the tortured wail” that is the song, suggesting that this track “might best be described as a musical approximation of Munch’s painting *The Scream*”. Considering that O’Connor has made such a clear link between her experience of abuse at her mother’s hands and the negative impact of the Catholic Church on Irish people like her mother, the potential uncertainty of the target of the attack in this song is telling.

Another way in which O’Connor is seen to be challenging conventional authority lies in her recent announcement that she is a lesbian. Her initial declaration, as reported by the *JAM! Music* website article “Sinéad Clarifies Gay Comments” (2000) reads “I am a lesbian. I have not been comfortable with that fact until recently. I have striven to be ‘straight’” (2) but the singer has subsequently recanted this statement.
Elysa Gardner’s “Confused Sinéad Throws Another Curve” (2000) reveals, however, that O’Connor is not merely accepting conventional notions of sexuality in again claiming to be ‘straight’ because the singer indicates that she has “explored [her] sexuality” and that she has “no shame about that” (quoted in Gardner:1-2). O’Connor further indicates that she should not be categorised by her sexuality – “I am not in a box of any description” (quoted in Gardner:2). “No Man’s Woman” on Faith and Courage can be viewed in the light of her revelations as a representation of such explorations when she sings, “I don’t wanna be no man’s woman / It don’t make me happy this mantrolling” (ll. 1-2) and “Cuz a man could fake you / Take your soul and make you / Miserable in so much pain” (ll. 13-15). The singer’s refusal to be ‘boxed in’ by others’ notions of normality again reveals her refusal to adopt or even accept the authority of society’s conventions.

As has thus far been demonstrated by several examples in this chapter, O’Connor is not afraid of challenging authority, whether attacking a parent-figure, an entire country, norms of society or even the Pope himself. She has, in interviews, revealed that she considers speaking the truth on a matter to be very important. In fact, Hilburn has indicated that O’Connor thinks “it is unhealthy to do anything other than speak the truth” (quoted in Hilburn 1992). Since she believes speaking up to be important, Maggie O’Kane writes in her article “I fit here,’ Sinéad O’Connor says of her return to Dublin” (1993) that the singer’s outspokenness has made her “an easy target” for media attacks. She has been quite candid about how difficult she finds such attacks, sharing revelations of suicide attempts and substance abuse on her part (Willman 1994). A particular bugbear for O’Connor is a tendency of the media to misrepresent her, and Niall Stokes’ article on the singer’s suffering, “I think it’s appalling to attack a
woman through her pregnancy” (1995), reveals something of this when he quotes O’Connor’s message to a newspaper guilty of such an attack: “you are killing me each time you print distortions of the truth. You are actually killing me. Do you realise that I nearly died because of you?” (1). While O’Connor has suffered emotionally because of media attacks, she has not passively accepted them. She has struck back, as, for example, in “Red Football” from Universal Mother. In what Morse calls a “liberationist anthem” (1994), she sings “I’m not no animal in the zoo / I’m not no whipping boy for you / You may not treat me like you do” (ll. 15-17). In this song, she “describes the feeling of being kicked around by the media and the gawking of the crowds” (Watkins 1994) and threatens “leaping up and getting [those who hurt her]” (l. 27). In “The Emperor’s New Clothes” on I Do Not Want What I Haven’t Got, she describes people’s attempts to control how she lives her life:

| There’s millions of people  
| To offer advice and say how I should be  
| But they’re twisted  
| And they will never be any influence on me (ll. 10-13) |

The Lion and the Cobra’s “Jerusalem” similarly suggests “Getting tired of you doing this to me / I’m gonna hit you if you say that to me / One more time” (ll. 15-17). In “All Apologies” on Universal Mother, O’Connor revives Kurt Cobain’s “anthem of defiance [which] seems to take on everyone, scattering insults like grapeshot among critics and fans alike and changing Ms O’Connor from victim to aggressor” (Watkins 1994) when she sings, “I wish I was like you / Easily amused” (ll. 16-17).

Several critics have noted that, with the release of Faith and Courage, O’Connor seems to have moved away from attacking institutions and people as overtly as can be seen in her earlier albums. She still, however, speaks with what Barry Walters calls “jaw-clenching directness” in his review, “Sinéad O’Connor Leads New Releases”
(2000:1). She seems to have moved into a more reconciliatory mode as she reveals in an interview with Richard Skanse, who writes, in “Sinéad Talks Joy, Faith and Courage” (2000), “[s]he’s not quite as openly confrontational … but she hasn’t gone soft” (1). Her focus seems to have changed from highlighting the flaws in society to attempting to heal them, particularly through encouraging a return to spirituality. O’Connor indicates to Skanse her willingness to be less abrasive and offers an apology to those whose feelings she has hurt: “let me say I’m sorry that things I did hurt you. That doesn’t mean I’m sorry I did it; it had to be done however, I’m sorry that it hurt other people” (quoted in Skanse:1-2). Several of the songs on Faith and Courage reflect this conciliatory tone, especially “The Lamb’s Book of Life” which contains the lines

I know that I have done many things
To give you reason not to listen to me
Especially as I have been so angry
But if you know me maybe you would understand me
Words can’t express how sorry I am
If I ever caused pain to anybody
I just hope that you can show compassion
And love enough to just please listen (ll. 9-16).

The message which O’Connor wants her listeners to hear is “[t]hat everything in this world would be okay / If people just believed enough in God to pray” (ll. 27-28). Another song, “The Healing Room”, speaks of finding acceptance and guidance from the spiritual dimension within oneself. This track also has a message for the listener. O’Connor sings, “The loving healer” – or spirit within – says “you’re not free if you don’t know me” (l. 13). Clearly O’Connor is trying to convey a message that people need to consider themselves spiritually. She says of her new-found self-love which has come from the discovery of her spirituality, “[i]t’s a joy … that you get when you go inside yourself and find out how much more there is to life than meets the eye” (quoted in Skanse:2-3).
Many of the songs on this album would have been written and/or recorded while O’Connor was preparing for her ordination and some reflect this spiritual leaning. She has, however, always to a greater or lesser extent been a spiritually-inclined singer. Critics have noticed this tendency and frequently comment on it, like the author of the Rolling Stone website article “Sinéad O’Connor” (1995), who observes that the singer is “[s]piritually inclined but anticlerical” (1) or Mick Brown, who observes that O’Connor’s “surfeit of righteous zeal” gives her a “zealot’s air” in his article “Bad girl, mad girl” (1992). The singer frequently makes use of Biblical references, naming, for example, The Lion and The Cobra after a line in psalm 91 and by intoning the “Prayer for Serenity” at the start of I Do Not Want What I Haven’t Got. In fact, even Universal Mother, the least obviously Christian-based of her albums, has been described as having “a pseudo-religious dimension” (Sinclair 1994). O’Connor has expressed religious ideas which are eclectic in nature, drawing as she does from a wide variety of religions including Judaism, Rastafarianism, Christianity and Paganism. She espouses beliefs which could disturb some religious people, especially those who are conservative in their faith: “Jesus Christ is actually a spirit. It’s a spirit that can exist through all of us” (1993b:3).

Although O’Connor has embraced the role of Catholic priest, she has done so with Rastafarian modifications, referring to herself as a “rastafarian priest” in an interview entitled “Building Bridges” (2000) with Grzegorz Brzozowicz. She continues, “I identify with Catholicism through the prism of my Irish character, but I feel Rasta [to] … the same degree” (4). In another interview, “Fame of Tear” (2000), with Honza Dedek, O’Connor, whose "brass crucifix [was] hanging on a braid in rasta colours", reveals that she finds elements of Catholicism and Rastafarianism very similar and equally
compelling (1). It is telling that O'Connor has chosen these two highly patriarchal, even misogynistic, religions as the basis of her spirituality. It seems that she has adopted and adapted seats of power which would ordinarily not embrace a woman such as herself – or indeed any woman. She is again attempting to subvert power hierarchies by appropriating for herself aspects of them usually reserved for men.

The Rasta influence shows up in Faith and Courage with its strong reggae rhythm in “Daddy I'm Fine” and “The Lamb's Book of Life”. In fact, the latter song contains the line “if we listen to the Rasta man / He can show us how it can be done / To live in peace and live as one” (ll. 37-39). “Kyrié Eléison”, a Christian litany, is the final track on this album which again highlights O'Connor's Christian background:

Kyrié Eléison  
Christié Eléison  
Lord have mercy …  
Christ have mercy (ll. 3-8)

The eclectic nature of O'Connor's religion is foregrounded by the symbols which occur on the cover of the album. They include “a halo of light” which represents the “care” and “safety … which …[are] given to us by a presence of a spirit” (O'Connor, quoted in Brzozowicz 2000:3). Also on the cover are a Rastafarian lion, a Christian cross and a flame which represents Paganism (3). Furthermore, this album is dedicated “to all Rastafari people. With thanks for their great faith, courage, and above all, inspiration” and also to “my Father for the same”.

O'Connor does not only embrace Christianity and Rastafarianism. She also, in three different songs on Faith and Courage, makes mention of “the goddess”. In “Dancing Lessons”, she equates “the good Lord” whom she asks to “guide us” with “the goddess” who is to “dance beside us” (ll. 25-26). Both deities are perceived to have positive roles in helping people. In "What Doesn't Belong to Me", O'Connor sings, “the
goddess meant for me only joy” (l. 14) and, again, in “Emma’s Song”, “the great goddess / Had us blessed” (ll. 14-15). These references to a positive goddess figure can be linked to Universal Mother, which contains “The Charge of the Goddess” in its sleeve. In this message “the mother of all living” – or the goddess – provides instruction for one who wishes to follow her ways: “Whenever ye have need of anything … then shall ye assemble in some secret place: to these shall I teach things that are yet unknown. And ye shall be free from all slavery”. “The Charge” concludes with a traditional greeting, “Blessed be”. In “All Babies” on this album, O’Connor reveals that she considers “God” and “Goddess” to be – at least sometimes – synonymous. She sings, “God gives them [babies] the stars to use as ladders / She hears their calls / She is mother and father” (ll. 6-8, my emphasis). The Unofficial Sinéad O’Connor website suggests that both “The Charge” and “All Babies” indicate that O’Connor is a Wiccan (2000:14).

Clearly, then, O’Connor is not bound by conventional notions of religion. She not only adapts Christianity to fit her needs, but also takes from other religions like Paganism and Rastafarianism in creating an eclectic merging which she finds satisfying. Many are offended by this and do not see her spirituality as valid. O’Connor, however – as can be seen in her more calm approach in Faith and Courage – clearly finds this approach fulfilling. Had she expressed her unconventional ideas in less tolerant times she could quite conceivably have been put to death. As was mentioned in chapter two, women and witchcraft have for centuries, even millennia, been linked. This pairing has often arisen because women were denied positions of authority where open challenge to those in power would have resulted, if not in the women’s deaths, then in their censorship and/or confinement to prevent their ideas from spreading. In such a society,
O'Connor would almost certainly suffer, combining as she does an alternative spirituality and an outspoken nature. In addition, with her life’s work seemingly directed at healing the effects of child abuse in herself and in others, she can also be viewed as a healer who uses whatever methods she can to cure. In another time she would have been a white witch.

O’Connor feels a strong affinity for another who was, in fact, burned as a witch in 1431. In “Joan of Arc is My Hero” (2000), O’Connor discusses this figure and shares the reasons that she considers her to be “the first feminist”. According to the singer, Jehanne D’Arc attempted to free her native France from the control of the English by approaching the Dauphin – would-be ruler of France – and asking for an army to fight on his behalf, claiming that visions of saints had appeared to her and said “she was to bear arms and … to be … responsible for driving the English out of France forever”. While fighting to liberate Paris, she was captured and held for trial. O’Connor claims that had Joan of Arc been a man, she would have been accorded prisoner of war status but, being a woman, was held as a “witch”, “idolatress” and “heretic”. At her trial she was accused of three main ‘crimes’: dressing like a man; bearing arms and fighting like a man; and defying the authority of the Church by suggesting that God had communicated directly with her and not through the Church. When she would not ultimately recant, she was burned at the stake – but France was, in fact, freed from English rule by her actions.

The similarities between O’Connor and Joan of Arc are striking: amongst other things, both have challenged conventional church wisdom; both have suffered for their alternative beliefs; both have adopted a man’s style of dressing; and both have fought to free their native homelands from invasive forces. O’Connor has on numerous
occasions asserted her strong sense of identification with this figure, saying “I feel quite akin to some of the things she went through. I think she was a sane person among mad people” (quoted in Leith 1992) and “she is a symbol and inspiration to me” (quoted in Watkins 1994). As Powers writes, “[l]ike her patron soldier, with her visions and battle plans, O’Connor displays an excessiveness that has long been considered a foible of the feminine: In another century, she would have been a martyr or at least a hysteric” (1997:380). Watkins would agree, writing as he does that Ms O’Connor sets a tone that sometimes seems self-sacrificing. By taking on the Catholic Church, she shows a willingness, perhaps even a desire to be sacrificed. The affinity she feels with Joan of Arc … reveals a need to be loved and accepted by the same powers she is simultaneously condemning and revering. It may appear that in the past, by so adeptly courting controversy, Ms O’Connor gladly laid the sticks of her own funeral pyre (1994).

The singer, who admits that she has been called a “liar” and a “madwoman” (quoted in Hilburn 1992) at times seems to identify with Joan of Arc’s intensity and courage in standing up to authority. She writes, “Milla Jovovich plays Jehanne [in the latest movie version of Joan of Arc] with an authentic sense of madness, which is realistic and chilling to behold. (One would have to have been slightly mad to be as daring as Jehanne)” (2000). Given O’Connor’s history of daring and outspokenness, it is tempting to see her as being cast from the same mould as Joan of Arc.

Sinéad O’Connor is more than a singer; she is a strong voice of protest and dissonance in a society which prefers women to be silent. Her dissatisfaction with the Church has led her to try and change it even as she loudly denounces those things she thinks wrong. She has challenged authority in many forms – from countries to parents and the Catholic Church – openly. She has stood up against child abuse and provided a role model for those who themselves have suffered such abuse. Her strong identification with Joan of Arc reveals something of her aim in making herself heard as
she does; she sees herself as one who can liberate others and share the ‘truth’. Even as one admires her strong stand against certain issues, one must acknowledge that O’Connor has, at times, been less than articulate in putting across her ideas. She is a spiritual woman whose loud protest earns her the title of witch – because she makes people uncomfortable even as she tries to heal them.
Conclusion

Women have, for centuries, been oppressed by the pernicious control of patriarchy. Its androcentric worldview has allowed the control, not only of individual women, but also of societal perceptions of women. Such perceptions have tended to create hierarchically ordered thinking where the valued half of a binary pair – the ‘male’ attribute – is prized more than its counterpart – the ‘female’ attribute. Such binary thinking, which has been eruditely discussed and analysed by Hélène Cixous amongst others, provides the basis for the denigration of women which is found so often in the Western world. Overturning such thinking thus provides a means of challenging patriarchy through not only re-valuing the so-called female aspects of the binary oppositions, but also challenging the very thinking which creates them, thus dispelling binary oppositions. The three chapters of this thesis have – in different ways – examined the operation of binary thought in three different time periods: prehistory, the Medieval period and the 1990s into 2000.

There can be little doubt that perceptions of women – both past and present – are frequently informed by society. The societal construction of the ‘reality’ of the ancient past is demonstrated, revealing women’s previously unsung contributions and strong evidence of a prehistoric Goddess-worship. Merlin Stone’s *When God Was a Woman* (1975) and Evelyn Reed’s *Woman’s Evolution* (1975) are, in many ways, still vitally relevant in investigating the ways in which science has constructed a ‘reality’ which is not necessarily accurate. As is revealed in “Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays” (1989), Cixous considers logocentric, Western thought to be underpinned by the construction of binary oppositions. Cixous’ essay is a valuable
theoretical text that contributes to the deconstruction of the perception in science that the human race has ‘progressed’ from a savage, uncivilised past into a ‘civilised’ present. Her groundbreaking work has illuminated the problems that come about because of a dualistic, or hierarchical, mindset as well as the benefits to be gained not only for women, but for all people and even Earth, if dualism were eliminated and replaced by an integrated worldview. In *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), Alice Walker can be shown to examine the presence and consequences of binary thinking, not only for women, but also for all marginalised groups. This novel acts as a site of defiance, standing against exploitation and oppression by people or groups in power. Walker shows an alternative view of the past and, in doing so, reveals a possible future unencumbered by hierarchical structures.

It is evident that the connection between women and witchcraft is very strong, having been forged over centuries, and accusations of witchcraft are frequently attempts by men – or by patriarchal societies – to exercise control over women. The witchcraft allegations, which are seen by some as the ultimate form of a gynophobia, have echoed to this day in perceptions of women. Challenging perceptions of women as ‘witches’ and rescuing the concept of the ‘witch’ from negative associations thus become tasks for feminists.

Modern witchcraft, or Wicca, embraces many aspects of the supposed witchcraft that the Medieval witch hunters sought to stop. It is also perceived to offer a form of spirituality unencumbered by hierarchical patterns and orthodoxy, thus being regarded as a more holistic approach to the world. It therefore acts as a site of resistance against patriarchy where women can find a space for themselves which is not androcentrically defined. African women, many of whom experience extreme patriarchy in their cultures,
often turn to witchcraft as a means of exercising control over their situations, despite the
danger inherent in being ‘found out’ as a witch. This seeking of control can be seen in
the character of Nomsa in Anne Landsman’s The Devil’s Chimney (1997) and also in
the eponymous prophetess in Njabulo S. Ndebele’s short story (1994). Both women, to
a certain degree, can be seen to have characteristics of a witch and who stand against
the androcentric, white-dominated societies they experience. These characters
represent South African explorations of a figure that has roots in the past and a strong
presence in Africa today.

Sinéad O’Connor stands out as a symbolic figure in contemporary society of the
ways in which logocentric thought still dominates society’s perceptions of women today.
She is considered by many to be a transgressive woman who has been denounced for
her public outbursts and defiance of authority. Following Cixous’ thinking, it is clear why
O’Connor has suffered for these outbursts: she refuses to accept her role as ‘other’, the
maligned counterpart of the ‘male’ half of the binary pair. Instead, she takes for herself
so-called male and female attributes as she chooses; and the hybrid self she creates
makes people uncomfortable because it does not reinforce ‘normal’ behaviour. She is
furthermore a manifestation of the concept of the ‘witch’ in that she, as an ‘unruly’
woman, is perceived to be a threat to society and is interested in healing, as a witch
often is. As a woman who challenges patriarchy, Sinéad O’Connor offers a role model
for women everywhere as well as for many marginalised people. By subverting binary
oppositions, her approach de-centres androcentrism and allows contemplation of other
ways of seeing the world. Although, as O’Connor could attest, society’s punishment for
such behaviour is harsh, the potential benefits are vast indeed.
The three chapters of this thesis have discussed perceptions of women in three time periods in an attempt to demonstrate how such perceptions have been socially constructed. The creation of binary oppositions, which frequently underlies the thinking of many social and cultural groupings, places ‘woman’ in a position firmly subservient to ‘man’ and so women have, for centuries, been oppressed and silenced by this hierarchical system. The fictional creations of Walker, Ndebele and Landsman offer means of resistance to this system; and O’Connor’s challenge to patriarchy is powerful, contemporary and provocative. Women have the means to fight androcentrism – be it by personally dismantling binary oppositions they encounter in their lives, or by subtly undermining them. Sinéad O’Connor, Alice Walker, Njabulo S. Ndebele and Anne Landsman all show ways of resistance for those women brave enough to take them. In Cixous’ terms, these people have embraced the Medusa; they have entered the “Dark Continent” (1997:354) and emerged unscathed. By presenting – either through fiction or in themselves – women who are strong outside of the control or permission of patriarchy, they offer to other women an alternative view of the Medusa within. As Cixous indicates of this Medusa, “she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (355) and now women must learn to laugh with her.
Appendix: Song Lyrics

**The Lion and The Cobra - 1987**

Jerusalem

Ran down and the lady said it
It got torn down
And the priest just said it
It got burned
They give me five years, five years
It's my turn
Ran down and the lady said it
It got torn down
And the priest just said it
It got burned
They give me five years five years
It's my turn
Oh Jerusalem
Oh Jerusalem
Getting tired of you doing this to me
I'm gonna hit you if you say that to me
One more time
I want to see you
And you're saying you're busy
I want to stop it
And you said it would be easy
It sure takes time
Hope your next time
Gonna be the last time
Hope you don't two-time
It'll be the best time
There won't be no next time
It's show time
I hope you do
What you said
When you swore
You'd make it better
Deliver all the letters
On time
Jerusalem
Jerusalem
Jerusalem
Jerusalem
Jerusalem

I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got - 1990

**The Emperor's New Clothes**

It seems like years since you held the baby
While I wrecked the bedroom
You said it was dangerous after Sunday
And I knew you loved me
He thinks I just became famous
And that’s what messed me up
But he’s wrong
How could I possibly know what I want
When I was only twenty-one?
And there’s millions of people
To offer advice and say how I should be
But they’re twisted and will never be any influence on me
But you will always be
You will always be
If I treated you mean
I really didn’t mean to
But you know how it is
And how pregnancy can change you
I see plenty of clothes that I like
But I won’t go anywhere nice for a while
All I want to do is just sit here
And write it all down and rest for a while
I can’t bear to be in another city
One where you are not
I would return to nothing without you
If I’m your girlfriend or not
Maybe I was mean
But I really don’t think so
You asked if I’m scared
And I said so
Everyone can see what’s going on
They laugh ‘cause they know they’re untouchable
Not because what I said was wrong
Whatever it may bring
I will live by my own policies
I will sleep with a clear conscience
I will sleep in peace
Maybe it sounds mean
But I really don’t think so
You asked for the truth and I told you
Through their own words
They will be exposed
They’ve got a severe case of
The emperor’s new clothes
The emperor’s new clothes
The emperor’s new clothes

Black Boys on Mopeds

Margareth Thatcher on TV
Shocked by the deaths that took place in Beijing
It seems strange that she should be offended
The same orders are given by her
I’ve said this before now
You said I was childish and you’ll say it now
“Remember what I told you
if they hated me they will hate you"
England’s not the mythical land of Madame George and roses
It’s the home of police who kill black boys on mopeds
And I love my boy and that’s why I’m leaving
I don’t want him to be aware that there’s
Any such thing as grieving
Young mother down at Smithfield
5 am looking for food for her kids
In her arms she holds three cold babies
And the first word that they learned was "please"
These are dangerous days
To say what you feel is to dig your own grave
“Remember what I told you
If you were of the world they would love you"
England’s not the mythical land of Madame George and roses
It’s the home of police who kill black boys on mopeds
And I love my boy and that’s why I’m leaving
I don’t want him to be aware that there’s
Any such thing as grieving

Am I Not Your Girl? – 1992

Untitled message

I'm not a liar and i'm not full of hatred
but I hate lies and so the liars hate me
the same who can't stand aside from a starving baby
can you really say you're not in pain? - like me?
are any of us living not painfully?
pain is what their lies have kept us in
but the war has started now
and truth will win
many of us are gonna lose our lives
and that's ok
because to live we have to die
the enemies of god will say it's chaos
just remember what jesus did in the temple
and be patient
exactly why do you think he was assassinated?
who did the dirty deed
who didn't like the answers they'd received?
look at the one wearing the collar
then and now - there's only ever been one liar
and it's the holy roman empire
and this is exactly what they did
they told us lies to take us away from god
so yeah, I am angry
but I'm not full of hate
I'm full of love
god said, “I bring not peace - I bring a sword”
**Universal Mother - 1994**

**The Charge of the Goddess**

She says,

> Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better to be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place; to these I shall teach things that are yet unknown. And ye shall be free from all slavery.

> Keep pure your highest ideal, strive ever toward it, let nothing stop you not turn you aside.

> Mine is the cup off the wine of life, and the cauldron on of cerridwen. I am the mother of all living and my love is poured out on the earth.

> I am the beauty of the green earth, the white moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire in the heart of woman.

> Before my face let thine inner most divine self be enfolded in the raptures of the infinite. Know the mystery, that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee,

> For behold, I have been with thee from the Beginning and I await thee now. 

> Blessed be.

**Fire on Babylon**

She took my father from my life oh
Took my sister and brothers oh
I watched her torturing my child
Feeble I was then but now I’m grown
Fire on Babylon
Oh yes a change has come
Fire on Babylon
Fire
Fire
Fire
She’s taken everything I liked
She’s taken every lover oh
And all along she gave me lies
Just to make me think I loved her
Fire on Babylon
Oh yes a change has come
Look what she did to her son
Fire
Fire
Fire on
Life’s backwards
Life’s backwards
People turn around
The house is burned
The house is burned
The children are gone
Fire
Fire
Fire on Babylon
Oh yes a change has come
Fire on Babylon
Fire
Fire oh,
Fire oh,
Fire on Babylon
Oh yes a change has come
Look what she did to her son
Look what she did to her son
Fire, haha
Fire, haha
Fire
Fire
Fire, aha
Fire on Babylon
Fire on Babylon

Red Football

I’m not no red football
To be kicked around the garden
No no I’m a red Christmas-tree ball
And I’m fragile
I’m not no animal
Though I am to you
I’m not no crocodile
Like the one in Dublin Zoo
Who lived in a cage
The length and breadth of his body
With a window which people would look through
And throw coins on his back to taunt him
‘though he couldn’t move
Even if he wanted to
I’m not no animal in the zoo
I’m not no whipping boy for you
You may not treat me like you do
I’m not no animal in the zoo
My skin is not a football for you
My head is not a football for you
My body’s not a football for you
My womb is not a football for you
I’m not no animal in the zoo
This animal will jump up and eat you
I’m no animal in the zoo
And I’ve every intention
Of leaping up and getting you
All Apologies

What else should I be
All apologies
What else should I say
Everyone is gay
What else should I write
I don’t have the right
What else should I be
All apologies
In the sun
In the sun I feel as one
In the sun
In the sun
I’m married
Buried
Buried
I wish I was like you
Easily amused
Find my nest of salt
Everything’s my fault
I’ll take all the blame
Aqua sea-foam shame
Sunburn with freezer-burn
Choking on the ashes of her enemy
In the sun
In the sun I feel as one
In the sun
In the sun
I’m married
Buried
Buried
All in all is all we all are
All in all is all we all are
All in all is all we all are
All in all is all we all are
All in all is all we all are
All Babies

All babies are born saying God’s name
Over and over
All born saying God’s name
All babies are flown from the Universe
From there they’re lifted by the hands of angels
God gives them the stars to use as ladders
She hears their calls
She is mother and father
All babies are born out of great pain
Over and over
All born into great pain
All babies are crying
For no-one remembers God’s name

“Famine”

OK, I want to talk about Ireland
Specifically I want to talk about the “famine”
About the fact that there never really was one
There was no “famine”
See Irish people were only allowed to eat potatoes
All of the other food –
Meat fish vegetables –
Were shipped out of the country under armed guard
To England while the Irish people starved
And then in the middle of all this
They gave us money not to teach our children Irish
And so we lost our history
And this is what I think is still hurting me
See we’re like a child that’s been battered
Has to drive itself out of its head because it’s frightened
Still feels all the painful feelings
But they lose contact with the memory
And this leads to massive self-destruction
Alcoholism, drug addiction
All desperate attempts at running
And in its worst form
Becomes actual killing
And if there is ever gonna be healing
There has to be remembering
And then grieving
So that there then can be forgiving
There has to be knowledge and understanding
All the lonely people
Where do they all come from
An American army regulation
Says you mustn’t kill more than 10% of a nation
‘Cos to do so causes permanent “psychological damage”
it’s not permanent but they didn’t know that
Anyway during the supposed “famine”
We lost more than 10% of our nation
Through deaths on land or on ships of emigration
But what finally broke us was not starvation
But its use in the controlling of our education
Schools go on about “Black ’47”
On and on about the terrible famine
But what they don’t say is the truth
There really never was one
(Excuse me)
All the lonely people
(I’m sorry, excuse me)
Where do they all come from
(that I can tell you in one word)
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong
So let’s take a look shall we
The highest statistics of child abuse in the EEC
And we say we’re a Christian country
But we’ve lost contact with our history
See we used to worship god as a mother
We’re suffering from post traumatic stress disorder
Look at all our old men in the pubs
Look at all our young people on drugs
See we used to worship god as a mother
Now look at what we’re doing to each other
We’ve even made killers of ourselves
The most child-like trusting people in the Universe
And this is what’s wrong with us
Our history books the parent figures lied to us
I see the Irish
As a race like a child
That got itself bashed in the face
And if there is ever gonna be healing
There has to be remembering
And then grieving
So that there then can be forgiving
There has to be knowledge and understanding
All the lonely people
Where do they all come from
All the lonely people
Where do they all come from

**Faith and Courage - 2000**

**The Healing Room**

I have a universe inside me
Where I can go and spirit guides me
There I can ask oh any question
I get the answers if I listen
I have a healing room inside me
The loving healers there they feed me
They make me happy with their laughter
They kiss and tell me I'm their daughter
I'm their daughter
They say
You have a little voice inside you
It doesn't matter who you think you may be
You're not free if you don't know me
If you don't know me
See I'm not the lie that lives outside you
And it doesn't matter what
You think you believe
You're not free if you don't know me
If you don't know me
See I am the universe inside you
You come to me and I will guide you
And make you happy with laughter
I joy in seeing you're my daughter
You're my daughter
So believe you're not free if
you don't know me,
If you don't know me
If you don't know me
If you don't know me
If you don't know me
If you don't know me

No Man's woman

I don't wanna be no man's woman
It don't make me happy this mantrolling
Thing that you got for me so I become
No man's woman
I don't wanna be no man's woman
I've other work I want to get done
I haven't travelled this far to become
No man's woman
No man's woman
Cuz I'm tired of it
And I'm not scared of it
That I'll never trust again
Cuz a man could fake you
Take your soul and make you
Miserable in so much pain
My friends think I'm alone but I've got secrets
I don't tell everything about the love I get
I got a lovin' man but he's a spirit
He never does me harm never treats me bad
He never takes away all the love he has
And I'm forgiven oh a million times
I'm never tired of it
And I'm not scared of it
Cuz it doesn't cause me pain
Like a man could fake you
Take your soul and make you
Never be yourself again
I never wanna be no man's woman
I only wanna be my own woman
I haven't travelled this far to become
No man's woman
No man's woman
No man's woman

What Doesn't Belong To Me

The woman named Iris gave birth to the goddess
In her son who can't say his name
Because of all the pain
I miss you, but I'm glad you're gone
I want you but I'm not alone
I'm haunted by you
But I'll get you gone if it takes me all my life long
Take back the pain you gave me
Take back what doesn't belong to me
Take back the shame you gave me
Take back what doesn't belong to me
I'm Irish, I'm English, I'm Moslem, I'm Jewish,
I'm a girl, I'm a boy
And the goddess meant for me only joy
And real love requires you, give up those loves
Whom you think you love best
Love puts you through the test
And only loyal love will be me happiness
Take back the rage you gave me
Take back the hatred you gave me for me
Take back the anger that nearly killed me
Take back what doesn't belong to me
And real love requires you
Give up those loves
That you think you love best
Love put you through the test
And only loyal love will bring you happiness
Take back the pain you gave me
You take back what doesn't belong to me
Take back the blame you gave me
Take back what doesn't belong to me
Take back what doesn't belong to me
Take back what doesn't belong to me

The Lamb's Book Of Life

Out of Ireland I have come
Great hatred and little room
Maimed us at the start,
And now home just breaks my heart
To America I have come
I hope to bring your preacherman
Home to show my people how they can
Get their names back in the book of the life of the lamb
I know that I have done many things
To give you reason not to listen to me
Especially as I have been so angry
But if you knew me maybe you would understand me
Words can't express how sorry I am
If I ever caused pain to anybody
I just hope that you can show compassion
And love enough to just please listen
Out of Ireland I did run
Great hatred and little room
Aimed to break my heart
Wreck me up and tear me all apart
To America I have come
I hope to find a good preacherman
Who can show me how I can
Get my name back in the book of the life of the lamb
I bring these blessings with me
A strong heart full of hope and a feeling
That everything in this world would be okay
if people just believed enough in God to pray
But the world thinks that sounds crazy
And that's the thing that makes me sing so sadly
To think that we would leave God so lonely
To think that we would mess up our own destiny
Out of history we have come
With great hatred and little room
It aims to break our hearts
Wreck us up and tear us all apart
But if we listen to the Rasta man
He can show us how it can be done
To live in peace and live as one
Get our names back in the book of the life of the lamb

Emma's Song

The first time I saw you
I loved you
I loved you
Your face blue
Your eyes too
Your mouth too
Your mouth too
When I heard you I wanted you
Give birth to you
Give birth to you
I made love to you
Made love to you
The great goddess
Had us blessed
The last time I saw you
I fought with you
I fought with you
I didn't mean to
I didn't mean to
Oh say you'll see me
Let me say sorry
The next time I see you
I'll love you
I'll be sweet to you
I'll take you to
My healing room
Oh we both know
How loneliness goes
Everytime I see you
I want you
I want you
The more I do
You hate me to
But the great goddess
Had us blessed

Kyrié Eléison

Kyrié Eléison
Kyrié Eléison
Kyrié Eléison
Christié Eléison
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy
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