

GENEALOGY OF WOMEN'S INDEPENDENCE

Love, struggle and work – the history of the world's women, past and future. And if there can be one final certainty it is this: that the love, the struggle and the work will go on.... (Miles, 1988, p. 288).

My original plan was to return to the genesis of psychology's emergence in the modern world to trace the genealogy of its theories about the independent woman but I found that, while I could find them, I could not explain their antipathy. I turned to the history of women's status, particularly that of independent women where I could find it, and it quickly became apparent that religious belief has always been inextricably interwoven with prevailing ideology through its legitimisation of political, social and economic structures. It seemed sensible, then, to attend to the evolution of religious thought, as well as political ideologies, and their relationship to women's status across time.

I will locate my curiosity in the Western tradition and its antecedents in the Mediterranean region in Section 4.1 before beginning the story of the independent woman from the earliest times. Section 4.2 progresses through her development Before the Common Era (BCE), from prehistory to the written record, extrapolating her likely status from that of the Great Goddess over millennia and what is known about women's comparable experience. The trajectory crosses the Middle East, Classical Greece and Rome, and the European Celts and the gradual displacement of the feminine spiritual omnipotence by the masculine. Discussion centres on the independent woman in English history in Section 4.3, from her initially valued place in early Christianity to her diminished status as social adjunct in modern times. This chapter concludes by linking women's independence with their access to financial autonomy, dependent on economic conditions across time.

4.1 Religion And The Western Tradition

Prior to the Enlightenment, institutional religion was the source of knowledge and authority channelled from deities whose will mirrored the organisational structure of their believers and whose patronage favoured the strong (Armstrong, 1993; Baring &

Cashford, 1991; Forth, 2008). Mythology validated political systems (Graves, 1973; Osborn & Burgess, 2004), past and present, and religious discourse dominated daily life. The following discussion will demonstrate the interlocking of religion, politics and economics to support prevailing ideology as it affects the lives of independent women.

The belief systems discussed are those relevant to present-day Western ideology, within which this project is situated. These systems are those from the Near/Middle East, the nursery of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the Greco-Roman pantheon and myths that still speak as metaphors in the twenty-first century of our era; and the Celtic traditions that assimilated with Christianity in the Middle Ages (Bahrani, 2001; Graves, 1972; Vivante, 2006). The Aegean influence on Hebrew, Greek and Celtic mythology, and the transfer of its holy trinity and Mother-and-Son mythological traditions to fundamental Christian belief, have been described in detail by others (e.g., Baring & Cashford, 1991; Graves, 1972).

4.2 Before the Common Era

4.2.1 Pre-historical. The earliest expressions of Western religiosity are from the *Palaeolithic* era, when human society comprised small groups of hunter-gatherers taking advantage of what their environment had to offer for sustenance and shelter as they moved across the landscape. Extrapolating from archaeological images, it was a time of social egalitarianism (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Diamond, 2007; Forth, 2008; Pollack, 1997) and this was reflected in spiritual beliefs.

Feminist archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas, has drawn from comparative mythology, early historical sources, linguistics, folklore, historical ethnography and pictorial sources of signs, symbols and images of divinities to paint a compelling, well-documented picture of the centrality of the Great Goddess in early spiritual and societal ideology. Unlike subsequent religious ideation where the Divine was cast in human then cosmic form, the Goddess was manifest in the flora and fauna of the natural world, and worshipped in related deifications such as the serpent, owl, tree, fish, bee, and so on. Some of these were represented as fantastical creations that combined totemic features with the female form. The landscape itself, with its

curves, mounds and peaks, was revered as the body of the Goddess (Pollack, 1997) and treated accordingly.

The ubiquity of Her presence is explained by the notion of transformation through the feminine life force (Armstrong, 1993), that life is forever changing through the cycle of birth, death and regeneration (Gimbutas, 1989). The cycle is reflected in the Goddess's triple aspects of maiden, mother, and crone that link to women's three menstrual life-stages that, in turn, mirror that of all life: birth and growth; maturity; degeneration, death then new life. The analogous relationships of corresponding lunar and menstrual cycles, and of the lunar cycle with women's menstrual life stages – that is, the new moon (newness and birth), the full moon (fullness/fertility), and its regular disappearance (waning/death) – were further evidence of a feminine cosmic order (Pollack, 1997).

Without an understanding of reproductive biology, fertility, as observed through nature's cycling, was thought to be a parthenogenetic blessing from the Goddess, requiring no external agent. There is no trace of a father figure from this period, nor images of war (Gimbutas, 1989; Graves, 1973). This is not to say that the masculine was discounted. If the feminine principle was creation, the masculine was stimulation without which growth and prosperity were vulnerable. While the images of the era indicate social organisation and ideology dominated by the feminine, the observable relationship of female and male in nature meant the integral roles and functions of the masculine were valued and celebrated.

Worship of the Goddess, in her myriad forms, continued through the *Neolithic* period, when, increasingly, agricultural settlements provided the social framework with seasonal rhythms of planting and harvesting confirming nature's cycles. The Goddess's creative power began to be sexualised (Gimbutas, 1982). Images often show Her flanked by strong male animals, predominantly the bull, and phallic imagery, sometimes combined with the feminine in the same icon, indicating growing appreciation of the male generative role.

Graves (1973) describes pre-history as a time of female sexual freedom, when kinship was matrilineal and paternal attribution had little meaning. It must be said

that acceptance of a matriarchal pre-history, while widespread, is not universal among scholars of antiquity. There are three general oppositional positions: first, that without written records it is not possible to be definitive about social structure from interpretable images and artefacts (Pomeroy, 1995); second, such a radical antithesis to subsequent patriarchal social organisation and ideology is unlikely; and, third, possible misinterpretation of patriarchy being an evolutionary progression from matriarchy thereby normalising male privilege as the natural order (Bahrani, 2001).

Imagery shows women's prowess as gatherers then transformers of plants for food, medicine, and clothing. It was this, and their invention of much household and agricultural equipment, that continued women's dominance through mechanisms such as matrilocality, where husbands moved to their wife's house on marriage (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Without historical records, assumptions about social organisation can be made only on the evidence of artefacts and images from early times. While interpretation is always open to dispute, the corpus of academic work that supports the prominence of the Great Goddess and her myriad manifestations is persuasive and compelling. There is little dispute about the power of female deities for peoples of the region, which, if analogous to validation of patriarchal ideology by a single male god, would indicate a public place for women as depicted in images of female agency that subsequently vanished over time.

Gimbutas (1989) dates the beginning of the decline of the omnipotence of the Great Goddess to the westward spread from eastern Europe of the Indo-Europeans, who brought with them not only farming and animal husbandry but also a patriarchal social and religious order. Farming/husbandry innovation allowed accumulation of wealth and status through production and private ownership of resource surplus, and introduced social stratification as an organising principle. A warrior class, with notions of an aristocratic elite, evolved to not only protect this new wealth but to capture that of others. Another development was the creation of task specialisation to support agricultural and martial efficiency, and to manage the accumulating property (Corcoran, 1970). The adoption of agriculture is considered by some to be the worst mistake humanity has made (e.g., Diamond, 2007), introducing a range of maladaptive changes including social and sexual inequality emanating from associated private ownership of property and wealth, hierarchical power structures

favouring the strong, and stratification of the means of production in a commodified economy.

Images of the Goddess were still dominant in the *Bronze Age* (2000–1550 BCE) (Baring & Cashford, 1991) and records from the period in Mesopotamia and Babylonia find no gendered distinction between private and public spaces (Bahrani, 2001). Women are reported owning and independently operating businesses (Forth, 2008) and enjoying a social status on a par with men (Vivante, 2006). They could inherit property although daughters were not uncommonly committed to celibate service of a deity, to ensure retention of family wealth through their infertility. Records from Mesopotamia and Babylon show that many of these women (the *naditus*) became independent and powerful businesswomen and some, ironically, bequeathed their property away from their family to younger women (Forth, 2008) to support women's inter-generational independence.

By the *Iron Age* (1250-600 BCE), representations of male deities were dominant (Keel & Uehlinger, 1998). Female and male figures rarely appeared together and, where they did, no interaction was depicted. Representations of women were either as servants or absent. Scenes of loyalty and fertility-promoting erotic contact between the sexes had been replaced by military themes. Where earlier images of the Goddess had been on metal, they were now on terra cotta implying both Her devaluation by the ruling classes and Her continued widespread private, domestic worship. The political and economic systems to manage accumulation of, and growth in, private property and ownership of the means of production, alien concepts in earlier eras, offer evidence of an increasingly misogynistic religious and social culture (Armstrong, 1993; Forth, 2008).

It was at this time that notions of oppositional forces were introduced to prevailing beliefs, for example, day-night, female-male, good-evil, white-black and, perhaps most radical of all, nature-humans. The new creation myths emphasised masculine separation from, and control of, nature and provided new explanations for seasonal and lunar cycling that, prior to this, had been perceived as complementary, part of the whole (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Images of the Goddess reflected a new bellicosity, depicting Her as a war or hunting deity, weaponed and in armour (e.g.,

the Greek Athene, the Canaanite Anath, and the Egyptian Isis in some manifestations). It was also in this period that “enthroned, clothed mother-with-child” (Keel & Uehlinger, 1998, p. 399) and nursing mother (Nielsen, 1997) images became common, perhaps reinforcing women’s increasingly limited, domestic status, although images of the Divine Mother and Child were sometimes found on artefacts from earlier eras. The prominence of these two images suggests another oppositional force, that of women’s fierce protection of family/peoples and nurturing maternity.

It is the religious development of the people of Canaan and Israel from the Middle Bronze and Iron Ages that is of particular importance for subsequent Western thought. It was from this lineage that the books of the Old Testament recorded the pre-Christian histories, parables and remaining myths from which Christian dogma developed and which remain important to today’s Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism). The evolution of Judaism is as much political as spiritual, with interpretations of the myths indicating their status as metaphor for the various allegiances, movements and national identity over many centuries (Graves & Patai, 1965; Keel & Uehlinger, 1998).

4.2.2 The Hebrews. Today’s Canaan would encompass Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Keel and Uehlinger (1998) report a strong mutual Canaanite-Egyptian influence in the Bronze Age, with religious iconography depicting the feminine and the masculine, often in sexualised imagery. The major deities, among many, of the Canaanites were the mother goddess Asherah, the father god El, their daughter Anath-Ashtoreth and their son Hadad-Baal (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Amongst other attributes, Baal was a fertility god whose mythic death and descent to the underworld and subsequent rescue by his wife-sister Anath explained the seasonal cycles of the death and regeneration. The death of a god and his restoration by a goddess was a common religious theme as were the associated sex rituals celebrated annually, generally by members of the religious and ruling elites, to ensure continuing prosperous fertility (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Forth, 2008).

At first, Yahweh-El and Asherah maintained their consort relationship in Hebrew mythology but gradually Her status became secondary to His and She assumed a mediating role between the increasingly distant, detached Yahweh and the people of

Israel, much as the Virgin Mary does today in Christianity. Asherah (also known as Anath or Astarte) continued to be worshipped through the cult of the Queen of Heaven (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Keel & Uehlinger, 1998), as Mary has been in the Christian tradition. Asherah continued to be worshipped in outlying communities of Israel until about 500 BCE (Baring & Cashford, 1991), when the elite Jews, exiled to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar II when he conquered Judah in 586 BCE, returned.

It was this latter group, the most prominent citizens of Judah before their deportation, who came to dominate Israeli culture on their return. They believed their misfortune had been caused by their failure to worship Yahweh as the one true god, as they had been instructed during their return centuries before from Egypt, and set about re-establishing Judah as a theological state with an underpinning patriarchal ideology (Hooker, 1996).

The prophets of Yahweh campaigned to overthrow worship of the Goddess. The image of Asherah was violently removed from the Temple in Jerusalem; the women of the sacred shrines, whose duties included sexualised rituals, were labelled as prostitutes; Old Testament stories recast the Goddess as the source of evil and the feminine as inherently shameful. The people of Israel became Yahweh's 'bride', rendering the feminine principle, previously divine, secular and valuable only in relation to the masculine god. Baring and Cashford (1991), depth psychologists for whom the story of the Goddess runs parallel to the evolution of Western consciousness, note the fundamental change brought by this development and suggest that Yahweh's 'holy war' against the Goddess became a cultural underpinning of a holy war of the masculine against the feminine. They suggest "it is worth considering here whether the fact that the oppositional paradigm in general, and the opposition of masculine and feminine in particular, has been accepted so uncritically owes something to the sacred nature of its origins: Yahweh, the Good God, fighting and overcoming the Evil Goddess" (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 461), with the feminine the source of sin.

The creation myths now gave sole responsibility for heaven and earth to a male god, and had him create the first man, Adam, out of dust. After several abortive attempts

(Graves & Patai, 1965; Monaghan, 1990), the first woman, Eve, was shaped from Adam's body, so demonstrating her subordination through her creation from a disposable masculine body part to provide companionship to an otherwise functionally autonomous being. Inherently lacking in self-control, Eve sealed women's fate to be forever responsible for humanity's mortality, sin and unhappiness by allowing her curiosity to overwhelm God's prohibition on eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, then prevailing upon Adam to share consumption of its fruit. God's response was to banish Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden, condemning Woman thereafter to painful childbirth and subjugation and Man to a life of hard work. This myth can be understood as mandating the overthrow of the Goddess by the newer patriarchal religion (Baring & Cashford, 1991; Graves & Patai, 1965). It also sanctified a social order predicated on the labour of the masses and women's subservience to, and dependence on, men.

All pre-Biblical sacred texts of ancient myths were either lost or deliberately suppressed by adherents to the emerging one god (Graves & Patai, 1965) including, from about 500 BCE, those of the Goddess. Keel and Uehlinger (1998) cite evidence that Her existence was denied because of the real risk Her worship posed to the now monodeistic Yahweh and no role was allowed Her in Judaic legal-cultic, historical, and prophetic traditions. Earlier attempts to expunge the Goddess completely had provoked a backlash, posing a real threat to Yahweh's primacy. The backlash particularly was from women who understood subsequent famines, wars, and general deprivation to be the result of renouncing the Goddess (Jeremiah 44:18).

Armstrong (1993) describes the period 800-200 BCE (the Axial Age), when the monodeistic belief system was developing, as a time of radically changing economic and social conditions. A merchant class was taking the ascendancy with associated increases in inequality and exploitation. "Strange as it may seem, the idea of 'God', like the other great religious insights of the period, developed in a market economy in a spirit of aggressive capitalism" (Armstrong, 1993, p. 27).

Yahweh's battle with the goddesses reflects a less positive characteristic of the Axial Age, which generally saw a decline in the status of women and the female. The prestige of the great goddesses in traditional religion reflects the veneration of the

female. The rise of the cities, however, meant that the more masculine qualities of martial, physical strength were exalted over female characteristics. Women's position was particularly poor in Greece. After Yahweh became the only god, his religion was managed almost entirely by men (Armstrong, 1993, p. 50).

Marriage and the family were regarded as holy in the Hebrew tradition, their proper conduct shaped in a legislative framework. Marriage customs included the *levirate*, where the widow is obliged to marry her brother-in-law to ensure continuation of the dead man's name by conceiving a male child, and the marriage of inheriting daughters without brothers to patrilateral cousins so that their inheritance remained in their father's family (Schwimmer, 1995). That there is little reference to unmarried women, other than in the context of their relationship to male relatives, indicates their invisibility in the social structure.

4.2.3 Greco-Roman (Classical) era. In Athens, the Olympian myths provided an explanation for the shift in power from the Goddess to a patriarchal god for both the Hellenic and then the Roman peoples who strategically absorbed deities from neighbouring states and conquered foe alike. In this tradition, the first being that followed Chaos, the dark primeval void, was Gaia, the primordial goddess, the Earth (March, 2001). Unaided, she conceived and bore Uranus, the sky, who became her son-husband and fathered many children, all of whom he hated to the extent that he forced them back inside Gaia, causing her great pain. She devised a plan to castrate Uranus and prevailed upon one of her sons, Chronus, to help her. This he did, and released his siblings only to later imprison them because of the threat they posed to his power as king of the gods. Chronus married his sister Rhea but, following a prophecy that an offspring would overthrow him, he adopted his father's approach to paternity and, as they were born, he swallowed his children as a preventive measure. In time, the prophecy came true, with Zeus first inducing his father to disgorge his siblings – Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades and Poseidon – then engaging him in a ten-year war before Chronus' defeat and imprisonment. Zeus, Hades and Poseidon then divided the universe between them, taking the heavens, the underworld and the seas, respectively, and agreeing to keep the earth and Olympus in common. The goddesses were denied property-owning status. Instead, they assumed responsibility for weddings, marriage and motherhood (Hera), hearth and home (Hestia), and

fertility and harvest (Demeter) (Osborn & Burgess, 2004). Also in the original family was Aphrodite, the Mother Goddess in many traditions (Baring & Cashford, 1991) but in Greek myth the goddess of sexual and social love (Cotterell & Storm, 2007). Artemis and Athena, both daughters of the prodigiously promiscuous Zeus, were associated with the hunt, childbirth and the new moon; and war and crafts, respectively. But

It was by marrying or fathering the goddesses that Zeus annexed or appropriated their powers to himself. As the Great Father, he was the undisputed head of the Olympian family, though the goddesses continued to be honoured in their own particular right. But the structuring of the world had become patriarchal... when he marries the many different goddesses whose rule preceded him, he does not extinguish their powers but brings them under his ordinance (Baring & Cashford, 1991, pp. 315, 318).

This sample sliver from the complexity of Greek mythology illustrates the shift from the feminine Goddess to a patriarchal socio-religious system as happened elsewhere in the region. Her powers were scattered across individual goddesses, originally major deities from the many cults absorbed into the evolving Greek culture (Laing, 1982), who now represented qualities largely relating to sexuality and fertility that had to be controlled, and those that legitimated sovereignty such as wisdom and justice (Munn, 2006).

An example of the legitimising power of myth is associated with Athena's ownership of Athens. In myth, Poseidon claimed possession of the city but this was contested by Athena who first made a gift of the olive tree to the city then, when the matter was put to an Olympic vote, won victory through her unanimous support by the goddesses that overwhelmed that of the gods. At a mortal level, it is likely that Athenians themselves held a referendum and it was the women's vote for Athena that prevailed. However, while Athena won the city, Athenian women were required to sacrifice citizenship rights, including suffrage and the tradition of matrilineal descent, to assuage the rage of either, respectively, Poseidon or Athenian men (Graves, 1973; Monaghan, 1990).

Similar to the Hebrew myth, the Athenians believed it was Woman who rendered life miserable on earth. According to this belief, men originally were the only human form on earth until, forbidden by Zeus, Prometheus gave them the gift of fire,

originally taken from them when they tricked Zeus into accepting once and thereafter the poorer remnants of sacrificed animals. Enraged, Zeus ordered Hephaestus, god of fire and metalwork, to make the first woman, Pandora, out of earth and water as punishment for men's disrespect. Pandora's sin, as with Eve, was curiosity that caused her to open a sealed jar given as a dowry from the gods, releasing previously unknown sorrow, disease, hard labour and war (Cotterell & Storm, 2007; March, 2001).

It is the Classical Greek, actually Athenian, period (c. sixth – third centuries BCE), characterised by philosophy, art, and shared governance, that was so historically influential for Western culture. Yet the power of Classical Athens rested on patriarchy and enslavement. Commonly referred to as the cradle of democracy, in fact only men born of Athenian citizens could participate in public life. Women, slaves and foreigners were excluded from the benefits afforded full citizenship (Joshel & Murnaghan, 2001; Munn, 2006; Pomeroy, 1995; Sartre, 2009). While Athenian philosophers established that free-born women were of higher status than slaves, the citizenship awarded them was sufficient only to allow their (i.e., their husband's) children to be born into the status.

Free-born women did not attain adult status (Munn, 2006; Vivante, 2006) and were always in the guardianship of father, husband, uncle, brother, nephew or son. There is evidence of female infanticide, resulting in an estimated sex ratio of five boys to one girl (Pomeroy, 1995). Both women and girls commonly were apportioned less food than men and boys (Vivante, 2006). The marriage contract was negotiated by the heads of two families, devoid of affection or consent although these may have existed or developed coincidentally, and designed to further political, social, and economic status (Sartre, 2009). Should an unmarried free-born woman become sexually active, she could be sold into slavery by her guardian (Pomeroy, 1995). This was one of only two examples of Athenian citizenship that could be lost, the other being free-born men who took a submissive role in sexual encounters with other men. The disparity in sex ratios meant no free-born Athenian woman remained unmarried (Pomeroy, 1995). While Plato makes uncritical reference to lesbians in his myth about the origin of the species (Trzaskoma, Scott Smith, & Brunet, 2004, p.

373), there is no indication as to whether they lived independently of men or, as with homosexual men, were expected to marry for the purpose of procreation.

Where there were no sons to inherit family property, a daughter married a male relative from her father's line, similar to Judaic practice, to ensure retention of family wealth. She was offered in predetermined order to first her paternal uncle then his sons, sometimes requiring the dissolution of their existing marriages (Pomeroy, 1995; Sartre, 2009).

Although Hippocrates, credited with founding the science of medicine, understood there were differences in women's and men's ill-health and treatment needs, the medical institution then as in recent times (Ehrenreich & English, 1978) reinforced ideology about female inferiority. Commonly, symptoms of ill-health reported by women were attributed to dysfunction of menses, menarche or the uterus (Demand, 2001).

One category of women that could independently accrue and control personal wealth, with earnings subject to a special tax, was that of prostitute (Pomeroy, 1995). It was possible for slave women to purchase their freedom, although not citizenship, through the proceeds of prostitution. The highest stratum of prostitutes were the *hetairai*, "companions to men", who were intellectually and artistically accomplished, several of whom achieved fame for their contribution to Athenian public life through the men with whom they were associated (Pomeroy, 1995; Vivante, 2006).

Misogynistic discourse was apparent in literature and drama although, towards the end of the Classical period, it became more sympathetic, as illustrated by the following dramatic lines:

On my own now I am nothing. But I have/often seen the nature of woman in this way./I mean that we are nothing. While young in our father's/house, I think we live the most pleasant life a person can lead,/for naiveté always makes children grow up in constant bliss./But when we reach adolescence, we understand./We are kicked out and sold to different buyers,/away from our ancestral gods and parents,/ some to strange men, some to barbarians,/some to joyless houses, some to abusive ones./And after a single night binds us,/We

have to praise it and believe that it is fine (Sophocles, c. 495-406/5 BCE, in Trzaskoma, et al., 2004, p. 392).

Plato argued that there was no inherent reason why elite women could not rule as well as men (Vivante, 2006). Possibly because of this sort of imprimatur, women became visible in philosophical communities, authoring works some of which survived to later centuries (Pomeroy, 1995). Women were prominent among the early Pythagoreans, writing on concepts of the soul, law and justice, or about women's ethical issues and appropriate virtues (Vivante, 2006).

Coinciding with this shift in women's status was the return of the Mother of the Gods to Athens. Her cult was widespread in the region but had been violently rejected in Athens where Her emissary, sent to Athens from Persia to seek reparation for past insult and recognition of Her sovereignty, and by extension that of Persia, was murdered (Munn, 2006). Continued hostilities between the two peoples, and associated Athenian defeats, caused greater appreciation of the Goddess's powers and, in desperation and hope, She was formally adopted in the fourth century BCE. Her cult was located in the Athenian Council House, the State archive of the laws and other documents that legitimised the Athenian state.

The abysmal position of Athenian women at the beginning of the Classical period had begun to improve by its end. Throughout this time, the cults of the goddesses had continued, particularly that of Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Carlson, 1997), yet the patriarchal citizenry suppressed and devalued the feminine in their society until its gradual, partial re-emergence in the Hellenistic period.

The lives of free-born Roman women in the final centuries BCE were the product of a Hellenistic influence following Rome's defeat of Athens in 200 BCE. They were also influenced by Etruscan culture (Cross, 2009) in which women had enjoyed greater freedoms than their Athenian sisters, including participation in public life and comparatively uninhibited interaction with the men in their lives. As a consequence, they enjoyed inheritance and property rights, including those of minors in their guardianship (Setälä, 1997). Not only could a Roman daughter use inherited property from her father as she wished, she had autonomy over its bequeathal up to and including ignoring her husband in her will (Saller, 2001). Another example of

women's independence is that of their participation in business; for example, in the second century BCE, women owned nearly half of the land from which materials for brick production were sourced; a significant number also took both owner and managerial roles in the brickworks (Setälä, 1997).

Despite having freedoms unknown to, perhaps even unimagined by, Athenian women, Roman women continued to be subject to their father's or husband's guardianship although this seems to have been more apparent in the statutes than in practice. By the first century BCE, when wealth could be measured in movable assets as well as land, guardianship of women after marriage lay with their father, a strategy to protect family inheritance from spousal control (Rei, 2001).

Marriage and maternity remained the epitome of women's achievement, reinforced by penalties for those who had achieved neither by their twenty-first year. There is no record of always-single women other than Vestal Virgins (Pomeroy, 1995) although there are records of women who registered as prostitutes to escape patriarchal control (McNamara, 1985). The Vestal Virgins were committed from Rome's upper echelons to thirty years' religious service. They had privileges unique among Roman women, such as being able to make a will during their father's lifetime and autonomous management of their property (Cross, 2009). Vestals who became unchaste were punished severely; at one stage of their thousand year history they were buried alive if found to be sexually active (Pomeroy, 1995). At the end of their service, they were released from their religious vows and given a dowry to bring to a marriage. Yet, as with the Babylonian *naditus* committed to life-long religious service by their families in earlier centuries, ex-Vestal Virgins preferred independence and to manage their property themselves, and most did not marry (Cross, 2009).

Roman widows were expected to suicide rather than live without their husbands although re-marriage was not uncommon, particularly in the upper classes, where widows of child-bearing age could again be used to create strategic family alliances. Divorce was available, mostly negotiated and arranged by the men of both the conjugal and the birth families, and largely associated with issues of women's fertility: either failure to produce a legitimate heir or the threat adultery brought to

patrilineage (Rei, 2001). By the era's end, women could initiate divorce, becoming, according to dramatist Seneca, serial brides (Carcopino, 1980).

Gender roles and mores were reinforced in public discourse of literature and theatre, as evidenced by Seneca's satirising marriage practices. Another example is that of women empowered by personal property who were caricatured as unattractive, domineering and abusive by playwrights such as Plautus who was antagonistic to women's independent control of their dowry (Rei, 2001).

As Athens had turned to the Mother of the Gods in its desperation to retain regional supremacy (Munn, 2006), so too did Rome seek the return of the ancient regional Mother Goddess, Cybele, as insurance against Hannibal's military advances (Butler, 2001). The Sibylline books cautioned that he would be defeated only if Her black stone was brought to Rome, achieved in 204 BCE with great ceremony. She was titled *Magna Mater* by Her hosts, and Her worship continued in Rome for some centuries into the Common Era (Monaghan, 1990).

For both Athens and Rome, women's morality was closely linked to political validation and stability as illustrated by their myths of civic origin and close control of women's behaviour. Yet, it is hard to know what to make of societies whose belief systems honour the feminine as the underlying life principle yet worked so hard to devalue women. Although individual women were credited with great literature, scientific discovery and political acuity, Joshel and Murnaghan (2001) suggest maintenance of free-born man's privileged status in the Greco-Roman era rested on externalising everything he did not want to be onto the Other, women and slaves. It is hard to argue when Pomeroy (1995) condemns as a devastating legacy Classical misogynistic literature and philosophical argument that women's natural, only sphere is as a second-class domestic subject to male authority.

4.2.4 The Celts. The other important influence on Western culture is that of the Celts. While there was never a Celtic empire such as that of Rome, tribes inhabited large tracts of Europe, stretching at their peak from Turkey in the east to Ireland in the west, loosely united by language and shared cultural values (Cremin, 1997; S. James, 1993). Without a literary tradition, their entry to history is through

chroniclers of Classical nations, beginning around 500 BCE (Chadwick, 1970; S. James, 1993).

While both Aristotle (c. 350 BCE) and Athenaeus (c. third century CE) report a prevalence of homosexual attachment among Celtic men (Rankin, 1995), and it was a patriarchal, gendered society (S. James, 1993), there was no accompanying denigration of women as there was in Greco-Roman culture. They were among the most independent women of their time, able to hold high office in religion and politics (Cremin, 1997). Bearing arms was not uncommon, and there are instances in Gaelic mythology of martial training schools run by women (the warriors Scáthach and Aife) who also led large armies (Ross, 1986; Savino, 2002). Gravesite evidence is that women of high status were buried with the same riches and accoutrement, including chariots, as that of men (Corcoran, 1970; Filip, 1977).

Social structure was built around tribe and family, linked by collective responsibilities and obligations (Filip, 1977). It was a hierarchical system of clientship, headed by a king or chief whose power was determined by the amount of the land he could claim, the size of the tribe and the number of clients, or fighting men, on whom he could draw. Women could not be married against their will and marriage was much more of a partnership than in the Classical world (Savino, 2002). Women could own and inherit property and had legal and economic independence. Divorce was available and, while controversial, there is a suggestion, based on Caesar's observations, that women could have multiple husbands as men could have several wives (Savino, 2002). This is consistent with reports of women in early northern Europe who, while living in a patriarchal culture, were not bound to monogamous marriages (Clover, 1993).

As with the other religious systems discussed, that of the Celts reflected, although did not seem to mandate, their political and social structure. The only report of a creation myth describes the Mother Goddess in a manifestation of divine waters fertilising the sacred oak to conceive The Dagda, progenitor of all other goddesses and gods. Belief was fundamentally embedded in nature, in the sanctity of the land, represented by a goddess of sovereignty (R. Stewart, 1990), the Mother of the Gods (Ellis, 1997; Ross, 1986). There seems little doubt that the majority of deities was

female, whose primary functions were associated with fertility, sexuality and war (R. Stewart, 1990). Mirroring earlier concepts of the Great Goddess, Celtic goddesses commonly were linked in triads, sometimes represented by a single deity (Filip, 1977).

The Celts held the power of the Goddess in the highest esteem. Kings or chiefs took their authority from tribal father gods who mated annually with Her to ensure the land's fertility, as had kings in earlier Mediterranean cultures (Chadwick, 1970; Ross, 1986; R. Stewart, 1990). Commonly, goddesses took precedence over their consorts and were awe-inspiring manifestations of the powerful, independent feminine. So much so that early Irish Christianity adopted the triple goddess, Brigit (Brigantia in England, Bride in Scotland and Brigandu in France), renaming her St Brigid to facilitate assimilation of pagan spirituality into Christian myth (Chadwick, 1970; Cremin, 1997; R. Stewart, 1990).

From the Irish myths and legends, thought to be consistent with archaeological evidence from elsewhere in Europe, and the Classical authors, it is clear that, within a patriarchal context, Celtic women enjoyed freedoms and independence unknown to their sisters around the Mediterranean in the last centuries before the Common Era. No reference has been found to status by marital circumstances. Female Celts are discussed as wives or daughters, possibly reflecting the lack of written accounts of daily life and of the patriarchal cultural prisms of their foreign historians. As noted by Clover (1993), "from the outset of the scholarly tradition, readers have been startled and not infrequently appalled by the extraordinary array of "exceptional" or "strong" or "outstanding" or "proud" or "independent" women – women whose behaviour exceeds what is presumed to be custom and sometimes the law as well" (p. 366). That it is the women who breach gender roles and expectations who enter the historical record deprives readers of any understanding of those who are conventional, marginalised or otherwise of little interest to the authoritative sources. However, it seems that Celtic women enjoyed an independence unknown to their Mediterranean sisters.

4.3 The Common Era

4.3.1 Early Christianity. By the third century CE, the Roman empire reached around the Mediterranean and across Europe to England. Previous strictures governing women's lives had relaxed, fertility had decreased, and women were engaged in public life to the degree they wished (Carcopino, 1980).

Within the emerging Christian church, there was a variety of interpretations of Christ's reported teachings, including those of the Gnostic texts that continued much of the Goddess tradition, although their deity was androgynous, and women could fully participate in the Gnostic church (Baring & Cashford, 1991). By the fourth century, Gnostic teachings were excluded from the orthodox Christian church and much of the early progressive social justice ideology had given way to institutional discourse (Armstrong, 1993). Accepted dogma was that argued by the unmarried Fathers of the Church, men such as Tertullian (155-222), Jerome (345-420) and Augustine (354-430) whose advocacy of a chaste life, ascription of blame for the world's ills to Eve's original sin of curiosity, and determination that all women should atone for Eve's behaviour laid the foundations of the misogyny still identifiable in today's Christianity (S. Bell, 1980).

Some of the rhetoric was as objectionable as that of Classical Athens and Rome. For example, Tertullian recommended that women always dress as though mourning and repenting Eve's sin because women are the devil's gateway, responsible for Christ's death, because Eve's behaviour introduced death to the world (Rogers, 1980). A reputedly more moderate authority is quoted, from a letter to a wavering monk, "... if you consider what is stored up inside (a woman's) beautiful eyes, and that straight nose, and the mouth and the cheeks, you will affirm the well-shaped body to be nothing else than a white sepulchre; the parts within are full of so much uncleanness" (Rogers, 1980, p. 86). Armstrong (1993) describes Jerome's letters as teeming with arguably deranged loathing of women.

Christ's close association with, and lack of discrimination towards, women had given them early freedom to take their share of prophecy and teaching. Further, Christ's dictum that to be His disciple is to leave family behind (e.g., Matthew.11:34-37) gave women the courage to do just that with many taking vows of celibacy to better

serve their god. It may also have been that the adoption of a chaste life was highly desirable for women repelled by the social milieu of the times (McNamara, 1985).

By the second century CE, there were communities of consecrated virgins, actively preaching and ministering in the public sphere. Adoption of an autonomous independent life caused much suspicion among the increasingly misogynistic clergy who began, through reinterpretation of the Gospels and other revelations, to limit the range of activities appropriate to female Christians (Vidén, 1997). The misogyny nascent in the years immediately after Christ's execution meant that, increasingly, women were relegated to support roles in the church, and their status returned to one of subjugation to men. In families, this meant to the male head of the household; in religious orders, to the male clergy who saw themselves as Christ's representatives on Earth (McNamara, 1985). Celibacy attained the status of being closest to God, ranked into a hierarchical order of lifelong virgins, those who assumed chastity from adult baptism, and those who maintained a chaste marriage, a not improbable circumstance within the new definition of marriage that saw a couple joined together by mutual consent in God's service (McNamara, 1985).

4.3.2 The Middle Ages. Antipathy by the orthodox Church to sexual expression saw, at the beginning of the fifth century, the formula *virgins-widows-spouses*, attracting 100-, 60- and 30-fold rewards, respectively, in heaven (Jussen, 2002), as a societal framework. This formula, applicable to both women and men as a moral compass guiding them to salvation, was dominant for the next 800 years during which marriage was tolerated as the only avenue for sexuality, itself accepted as inevitable but an affront to piety.

Possibly because of their Celtic tradition, it was not unusual for women to take leading roles in Anglo-Saxon England. Women were early adopters of Christianity, brought independently to Britain and later mandated as the empire's religion by the Roman invaders with Celtic Christianity subsumed into the orthodox Church (Chadwick, 1970). The cult of the Virgin, reminiscent of the Athenian cult of the Mother of the Gods, developed in England by the middle of the seventh century. Communities of women inhabited quite powerful monasteries, headed by an abbess invariably of noble birth (Leyser, 1995). Women came to the monasteries from a

variety of backgrounds. Some were dedicated while very young by their families, some were unmarried daughters surplus to family requirements, some chose the religious life of their own accord, some preferred the cloisters to betrothal or marriage, some wanted to retain control of their own property or the power and influence they had as wives of now dead powerful men.

Little is known about the lives of laywomen in Anglo-Saxon times. What records there are relate to the aristocracy, by definition atypical of society in general. Marital status was elastic at all levels of society and, until the eleventh century, it appears even priests maintained concubines as well as more regularised relationships (Crick, 1999).

Post-Conquest, little changed for women other than the beginning of their withdrawal from public life. Whereas in pre-Conquest England it was unremarkable for aristocratic women, including those in monasteries, to occupy positions of authority, in post-Conquest England the principle of primogeniture became the norm. Any power available to women was through their male relatives (Leyser, 1995). They commonly assumed an intermediary role between subjects and the lord or king analogous to that of the Virgin Mary between people and their god or, millennia earlier, between the Canaanite Goddess Asherah and Yahweh.

Women continued to enter monasteries, supported by Christian literature of the time that encouraged the abandonment of family to better serve God (Beach, 2002). Nunneries maintained their wealth and prestige, managed by influential aristocratic abbesses (Leyser, 1995). Echoing their earlier Christian foremothers, renunciation of procreative responsibilities allowed medieval religious women to become more like a man in theological eyes, eschewing the feminine domestic domain. This was doubtless highly desirable when luminaries such as Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century taught that, individually, “woman is defective and misbegotten” (Bell, 1973, p. 122) although necessary for procreation; her subjugation natural both to best serve men and for self-improvement through learning from man’s inherent rationality and wisdom.

During the Middle Ages, *virgin-widow-spouse* gradually shrunk from its fundamental role as a general social compass for spiritual and moral aspiration to becoming a narrow descriptive classification just of women (Jussen, 2002). By the thirteenth century, virginity meant women's, generally girls', sexual celibacy (Jussen, 2002) unlike in earlier times when, for example, Athenians understood "virgin" to mean a girl, a concubine, a wife not yet a mother, an elderly woman without a child or husband (Viitanieni, 1997). Noteworthy is the cult of the Virgin, the most dominant expression of medieval Christianity, mirrored, to a lesser degree, by the cult of the lady in chivalric literature (Power, 1973). It has been argued that the Virgin and the Lady were two sides of the same coin, a patriarchal idealisation of the feminine that simultaneously created unachievable heights against which women were measured and elevated them out of the worldly public sphere (Bloch, 1991). Saints had the same function as the deities of antiquity, becoming purpose-specific patrons for the range of human endeavour. Female saints often had powers similar to earlier goddesses for family and domestic affairs. Pamphlets in the late Middle Ages commonly taught approved family functioning through the example of the Virgin, her mother, Anne, and her grandmother, Emerentia (Wiesner, 2000), a triad that mirrors the triple aspect of the Great Goddess.

There was a range of texts promoting a virginal life for women in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, including the Katherine Group of devotional texts that argued that marriage is a descent from a state of autonomy and communion with God, harming women both financially and emotionally (Hassel, 2002). The popularity of the virginal, devotional life for women of this period may be understood as constructing a third gender (Salih, 2001), expression of which was quite distinct from the conventional feminine. Where virginity was highly valued and fiercely protected in young women, expected to make a good marriage, discourse in medieval literature ridiculed older secular virgins as being old, barren and useless (Bernau, 2007). Continuing Hippocratic tradition, medical discourse reinforced ideological negativity towards the older virgin through its authoritative descriptions of physical, mental and physiological dysfunction characterising her sexual condition.

Widowhood freed women from the legal status of *femme courverte*, a "covered woman", a component of her husband's person, to become *femme sole*, affording her

comparative autonomy in her asset management and enjoyment of privileges unavailable to other independent women (Abram, 1973; Barron, 1994; Bennet, 1992; Gies & Gies, 1987; Hanawalt, 1992; Leyser, 1995; Stretton, 1999). There is evidence that, as in earlier times, women bequeathed property to other unrelated women such as friends or even servants (Barron, 1994) and a surprising number chose not to be buried with husbands.

At least 10% of medieval English households were headed by widows (Leyser, 1995). Remarriage was less attractive for widows with inherited wealth or other means of self-support and many chose to live independent lives (Barron, 1994; Bennet, 1992). Both widows and always-single women continued to enter nunneries or, for those unable to pay the cost of entry, equivalent to a dowry, pledged chastity and joined together in lay religious orders (Leyser, 1995; Power, 1973).

Poor widows had to support themselves by any means possible including remarriage or seeking public charity (Schen, 2001). Because the latter meant financial cost to the parish, civic fathers actively sought employment for them, especially those with dependents. Hospitals in particular afforded refuge for widows, providing accommodation and employment (Leyser, 1995).

Contrary to their range of roles and responsibilities that could be observed in everyday life, discourse about widows' lives revealed in plays, sermons, jokes and literature ridiculed a feminine caricature (Carlton, 1978). From this perspective, loss of a husband's control created a woman who was immodest, lewd, promiscuous and sexually rapacious (Carlton, 1978; Mirrer, 1992; Stretton, 1999), pathetic in her desire for a husband. Yet the evidence is that it was the vast majority of widowers who remarried, and more quickly, after bereavement than widows (Bennet, 1992; Pelling, 2001). Widows were more likely to stay that way, particularly if their circumstances allowed adequate means of financial self-support.

A common theatrical plot was that of unscrupulous young men preying on widows to gain access to their property. This was understood to be a valid strategy for male advancement (Brodsky, 1980), with entertainment value attached to the widow's worldly experience depriving her new husband of his reward through quarantining

her assets from his reach, and achieving domestic dominance (Clark, 2001). Carlton (1978) argues that discursive denigration of widows in the Middle Ages reflected men's fear of women independent of male control, of being posthumously cuckolded and of their own mortality contrasted with women's comparative longevity. He also introduces notions of projection, in this case of men's own sexual and anarchic urges on to independent, mature women.

The high point of the Middle Ages for English women was the century after the Black Death until the late fifteenth century. Low population growth required greater female participation in paid employment, corollaries of which were their reluctance to relinquish financial independence and greater discrimination in their choice of marriage partner (Kowaleski, 1999). Urban populations swelled as people migrated from the country in search of work, a significant number of whom were always-single women, the majority entering the service of the growing middle and established upper classes (Leyser, 1995). In some centres, authorities discouraged always-single women's independent living (Froide, 1999; Peters, 1997; Thomas, 1973), demanding that those aged less than 40 years be in service until they married or lived in the house of "an honest person" who could vouch for their character and behaviour. Women defying this requirement were prosecuted, sometimes imprisoned, and exiled from the town. Noting that there was no source of demographic information about single women prior to the fourteenth century, Kowaleski (1999) reports that a poll tax taken in England in 1377 records 29.9% of the population aged 14 years and older were single women, a conservative figure given that many evaded paying the tax. An increasing range of sources suggests an estimated 30-40% of women in late medieval England had not married, possibly because of the economic leverage offered for economic independence by demand for their labour (Beattie, 2007).

Towards the end of the era, during the transition to industrialisation, many of the occupations previously available to always-single women, such as brewing and weaving, disappeared as mechanised automation replaced small scale production (Leyser, 1995). Spinning continued to be the exclusively-feminine occupation it had always been, particularly among women disadvantaged by poverty, infirmity or age (Pelling, 2001). Many independent women were included in the Poor Rolls of the

time, and many turned to petty crime or prostitution to survive (Hanawalt, 1986; Thompson, 1993).

Attitudes towards always-single women ranged between indifference and hostility. As with widows, aging always-single women were subjects of ridicule in sixteenth century song, although younger women yet to marry received a more positive press (Bennet & Froide, 1999). By the sixteenth century, *singlewoman* could be used interchangeably with *prostitute* (Karras, 1999), possibly because economic desperation drove some women to this means of self-support, and women in service were increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation in their employer's household as alternative employment options disappeared (Leyser, 1995). Marginalisation of women outside the virgin-wife-widow triad grew commensurate with their economic deprivation. There was no definition in the moral texts of the day of a non-commercially sexually active singlewoman. Any unchaste singlewoman was termed a prostitute, understood to take all comers, driven by greed as well as lust (Karras, 1999).

Discussion of unmarried women in the Middle Ages cannot pass without mention of the witch hunts that killed so many of them, perhaps millions across Europe (Williams & Adelman, 1978). In England, witch trials were secular, most held in the highly volatile, unpredictable Elizabethan times (Thompson, 1993) that accompanied massive political, economic, religious, climatic and social transition (Rosen, 1991; Williams & Adelman, 1978). Part of the problem was the social dislocation brought by population growth and harsh capitalism that saw greater social division and poverty (J. Sharpe, 2001). The great majority accused of witchcraft were women, thought to be more prone to sorcery because of their inherently weaker moral and intellectual abilities, and innate corruptibility (Williams & Adelman, 1978). The stereotypic English witch was a poor, lonely, unprotected, elderly woman (Rosen, 1991; J. Sharpe, 2001; P. Stewart & Strathern, 2004; Williams & Adelman, 1978), generally with a reputation for malicious and often unchaste behaviour, denounced for causing personal harm to her accuser rather than for witchcraft *per se* or heresy. Most accusations of witchcraft in England were made by close neighbours and were based on a wide range of disputes that had inexplicable repercussions or, rather, repercussions that were attributed to satanic intervention (J. Sharpe, 2001). A

common example was that of a poor, elderly woman asking her wealthier neighbour for perhaps food, money or odd jobs. Her negative reaction on refusal might include threats or curses that were remembered if misfortune was later visited on the neighbour who then accused the woman of witchcraft. It was women habitually inclined to respond to frustration with verbal insult or curses who were likely to be accused, women whose behaviour was considered an affront to notions of femininity (P. Stewart & Strathern, 2004).

From the beginning of the Middle Ages, the Church led discourse about the meaning of marriage, partially as a strategy to enforce a celibate clergy and partly to resolve debate about the role of sex in marriage (Duby, 1994; Resnick, 2000). While the ideal Christian marriage was spiritual and celibate, there was reluctant acceptance that sexual desire existed and the best containment policy was to limit it to married couples, understanding that its purpose was procreation, not pleasure. By the end of this period, Catholicism was enumerating God's purpose in marriage as (i) the friendship and mutual support of the conjugal pair, (ii) procreation, and (iii) avoidance of lust and fornication (Leites, 1982). Other theologians, including the Puritans of recently Protestant England, were arguing for the inclusion of sexual pleasure as a component of a good marriage. Marriage was the ideological norm, reinforced with authoritative comment such as that by sixteenth century Dutch theologian, Erasmus, who asked whether there was anything more hateful than a contented bachelor (Leites, 1982); the possibility of contented singlewomen perhaps not imaginable.

The family structure was the living representation of the state (Kazmierczak Manzione, 1996). So much so that the always-single Elizabeth I was reproached publicly for her failure to marry and stabilise her realm through providing a successor to the throne (de la Torre, 2001). Underpinning this anxiety were not only concerns about the possible return of a Catholic monarch but also assumptions about women's need for spousal guidance and their inherent unsuitability for public life. Possibly to assuage these anxieties, Elizabeth added the *Homily on matrimony* to be preached at marriage ceremonies (Aughterson, 1995). The homily confirmed a woman's subjection to her husband, and that male authority is God-given (Stenton,

1973) – speculatively, Elizabeth’s spinsterhood may well have been to avoid compliance with such societal constriction of wives (S. Bell, 1973).

Apart from Church dictate, there were many tracts to guide women’s behaviour in the Middle Ages (Aughterson, 1995; S. Chamberlain, 2002; Mirrer, 1992). Foremost among these was Juan Luis Vives’ *The instruction of a Christian woman*, first published in 1523 and translated into French, German, Italian and English from the original Latin (Aughterson, 1995). These texts covered all aspects of women’s lives although, to twenty-first century eyes, they were rife with ambiguity and contradiction, and offered little guidance in situations in the real world outside those prescribed as ideal (S. Chamberlain, 2002).

Literature, too, offered moral guidance to women. For example, Sir Philip Sidney, author of the Renaissance novel *Arcadia* believed in the unique power of fiction to teach through modelling examples of proper behaviour and the consequences of non-compliance. That these instructive texts were authored to teach required comportment indicates women’s generalised failure to comply with patriarchal expectations.

4.3.3 The modern era. Based on Marriage Duty assessment figures, independent women were calculated to comprise at least one third of women in late seventeenth century England. This is likely to be the minimum calculable because always-single women aged from 25 years and widows did not pay the tax, and other adult single women could be listed as “daughter” or “child” of a male household head. Taking these circumstances into account and considering relevant data from other sources, it is possible that about half of all adult women at the time of the surveys in early modern England were unmarried (Froide, 2002).

The population of independent women in Europe rose in the seventeenth century, most prevalent in urban areas (Kowaleski, 1999), as women moved from the country in search of work. The pool of potential husbands had diminished due to men’s overseas migration in search of their fortunes, absence while fighting in the regular conflicts of the era, migration around the country in search of work, or succumbing to infection and plagues to which they were more vulnerable than women (Spicksley,

2003). As well, the Elizabethan Poor Laws had made it more difficult for poor people to marry. Local parishes were responsible for supporting needy residents and, to reduce the burden, the clergy would refuse to marry migrants to the area who should be supported by their own parish or couples where the bride would bring minimal or no assets to help establish conjugal life (Spicksley, 2003). It is also possible that lifelong singlehood was a choice made by women who could take advantage of the economic opportunities available to them to provide for themselves.

Families became reluctant to lose productive daughters or a bride portion to marriage (Peters, 1997), leading to eventual bequests, as parents died, that allowed continued self-sufficiency. As well, women married later partly because of the time it took to accumulate their marriage portion and some decided to use the money to support an independent rather than a married life. Spicksley (2003) draws attention to sixteenth century legalisation enabling interest to be levied on loans, noting a sharp increase in singlewomen's investment portfolios over the following century. She also notes that marriage was regularly parodied in popular culture, concomitant with celibate life increasingly lauded for allowing service to the public good, undiverted by family demands.

That said, marriage was still the preferred path for women to tread and singlewomen *per se* were still the most disadvantaged women. Less likely than widows or impoverished men to receive poor relief (B. Hill, 1989), they were expected to be self-supporting within constraints that protested against and penalised their independent trade practice, privileged employment of widows and wives, and imposed heavier fees on the few who did manage to begin businesses; most singlewomen went into service (Froide, 1999).

It was in the seventeenth century that the occupational category "spinster" first appeared as an official demographic class, and the honorifics "Miss" and "Mrs" introduced as marital categories (Erickson, 1999). In the eighteenth century, spinster became conflated with the derogatory label "old maid" (Hufton, 1984) that signified ugliness, ill-nature, jealousy, nosiness, foolishness, and prudery simultaneously with lasciviousness (Bennet & Froide, 1999), and heterosexual desperation associated with vehement rejection by potential suitors (Lanser, 1999). Singleness again

became problematic for social order and for individual women who were denigrated as morally deficient, helped in no small degree by cultural discourse over the century that reduced the virtuous and respectable self-sufficient always-single woman to a figure of ridicule (Lanser, 1999). This reversal of status for the celibate woman followed the 1549 Act allowing priests to marry, an ideological shift brought by the imposition of Protestantism as the prevailing religion in England (K. Davies, 1981) in which its clerics modelled proper family life.

The attack on the single woman/spinster was arguably a patriarchal response to their increasing numbers and their threatening independence as they took advantage of the economic opportunities brought by increasing industrialisation and the growing middle class market that was out-sourcing some previously domestic production (Bennet & Froide, 1999; Lanser, 1999). It may also have been caused by falling birth rates (Lanser, 1999; Wrigley, 1981) at a time when creating a workforce to both manufacture and consume the products of increasing mechanisation, and to populate and administer the developing empire was deemed vital to England's prosperity.

As with women in previous ages, spinsters of independent means not uncommonly bequeathed property to younger single women (Froide, 2001), particularly to nieces but also to others with whom they had shared close relationships of friendship, or even as mistress of servants. Working class spinsters continued to struggle in low paid jobs, sometimes clustering together for mutual financial support, or as with their predecessors, turning to crime or prostitution to survive (Hufton, 1984). Many older working class spinsters exploited their early training to become specialist maids (such as nannies, cooks, or housekeepers). The challenging financial times across the eighteenth century are thought responsible for an astonishing 25-30% rate of unmarried aristocratic daughters, suggested to reflect the prohibitive costs of marriage portions at this time.

Up to the eighteenth century, an estimated 14% of households were headed by independent women, most commonly by widows (Hufton, 1984). Perhaps braced by guidebook advice such as that of Vives' sixteenth century exhortations to widows to remain chaste in isolation as though their husbands were still alive, those in England continued their public life and were increasingly reluctant to remarry (Todd, 1999),

particularly if they were women of means. Remarriage was strongly discouraged in Protestant England with widowhood a metaphor for affliction and loss. Salvation could be achieved through subsequent independent lives that enabled them to approach men's status, as had been the case for celibate women in early Christian times. Poor relief was relatively generous to the needy widow, but not to spinsters, as was her privileging in some districts for placement in available work (P. Sharpe, 1999). Yet this support was monitored closely, and likely to be withdrawn, if she was thought to have offended patriarchy's expectations about her work ethic and morals.

Companionate marriage was becoming ideologically desirable, in which context remarriage was a betrayal of the widow's first husband (Foyster, 1999). This discourse was apparent in literary sources that mocked and condemned spouses of multiple marriages. In this discourse, subsequent marriages were motivated by women's sexual insatiability, unlocked by their first marriage, and men's ambition for unearned material gain, rather than a quest for companionship.

The notion of companionate marriage, however, brought adverse changes to women's financial security. Financial discussion by wives, including their support if widowed, was thought to be mercenary, unfeminine and domestically disruptive (Erickson, 1999). Spouses were considered to be one person in law which, in reality, meant the husband's ownership of all marital property including his wife's assets, her management of which was lost when she married (B. Hill, 1989). On his death, the newly romanticised notions of marriage required lengthy periods of mourning during which the widow withdrew from public life and the marriage's resources were managed by a male guardian who controlled the family business and paid the widow an annuity (Stone, 1993). This contrasted with earlier times when she was bequeathed the business and its tools of trade to enable self-sufficiency in widowhood (Botelho & Thane, 2001). Similarly, a husband's contribution to public life was, *ipso facto*, also his wife's, justifying her exclusion from independent agency (Wiesner, 2000), an exclusion extended, in anticipation, to the unmarried woman because it was expected that, at some point, she would be married.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the vast majority of women in England were employed in a wide variety of trades that were gradually lost to them through the gendering of occupations and work practice, driven by mechanised processes and the tightening economy (B. Hill, 1989; King, 2004). For the first time, women's ascribed monopoly on spinning was broken by the introduction of machinery which women were thought too weak and unskilled to operate. The model of the family production unit vanished, and competition for available employment saw women increasingly marginalised to low paid, unskilled work rather than being allowed to compete with men for household-supporting wages (Raven, 2004). Increasing dependence on men for survival saw a drop in the median marriage age across the eighteenth century, as marriage became women's major survival strategy. Indeed, the situation became so dire that, according to Hill (1989), by the end of the eighteenth century, women could exist only by marrying or prostituting themselves, which, in the circumstances, could be considered two sides of the same coin. Women continued to dominate poor relief, taking advantage where they could of new approaches that sought to facilitate self-sufficiency rather than on-going dependence on charity (King, 2004). Yet, also from the eighteenth century, women found a role to play in education, as governesses in private homes, as teachers in existing schools and as founders and principals of new ones (Hufton, 1984). Driven by exclusion from the means of self-support, it was spinsters and widows who were in the forefront of pressure for social change, who fought for inclusion in higher education and the professions, and in public life (B. Hill, 1989; Hufton, 1984).

The 1857 *Matrimonial Clauses Act* introduced legal divorce, on the basis of adultery, following which a different discourse entered popular literature, one that reflected new expectations of conjugal happiness and admitted the misery that generations of wives had endured (Showalter, 1978). Anxieties about the incidence of fictional – and some factual – lethal poisonings of husbands contributed to the introduction of a Bill to control the sale of poisons. Discussion of marriage became the means by which much art and literature questioned prevailing social conditions (Kranidis, 1999). Prominent among these were John Stuart Mill's *The subjection of women* (1861), credited and vilified at the time for encouraging women's aspirations to independence and the vote (Cooper, 2001; Showalter, 1978); Wilkie Collins' *No name* (1862) in which he examined social identity and bourgeois morality through

the responses of two sisters to their illegitimacy, suggesting that women were in greater need of protection from patriarchy and capitalism than from independence; and George Gissing's *The odd women* (1893) that dealt with the problems of spinsterhood and women's socio-economic dependence (Kranidis, 1999). Many Victorian women, including Florence Nightingale and Frances Power Cobbe, wrote polemics about the dangers of financial dependency for women. Others, such as Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, fictionalised representative characters to analyse related problems and their resolution (Dolin, 1997). Educationist and writer, Mrs William (Maria Georgina) Grey, published a pamphlet from her lecture *Old maids* that discussed the degree to which financial independence underpinned class and gender stereotypes that either admired a rich spinster's independence, honour and honourability, or labelled a poorer woman disagreeable, ridiculous and a laughingstock (Kranidis, 1999).

In an opposing discourse, the establishment's fear of the independent woman surfaced in literature that demonised her. Not even the religious woman was immune to this backlash with narratives about depraved convents alongside those of the home-wrecking prostitute and labelling as fallen women those who worked in factories and other low-income industries (Bernau, 2007). Undeterred, increasing numbers of women opted for independence and middle-class fertility rates declined (Showalter, 1978). Advice books that had extolled the benefits of marriage for women and their deportment within it began warning women against waiting too long for their prince to come and expecting too much from their husband once wed. There was also a flood of advice books for always-single women, enjoining them to live lives of devout restraint. At a time of its increasing unpopularity, social commentators warned against validating options to marriage for women whose interest in the institution was clearly waning (Vicus, 1985).

The nineteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of unmarried women in Britain, due to the unavailability of suitable husbands through emigration, war, and unemployment. In 1851, there were more than one million never-married women and three-quarters of one million widows, comprising nearly 9% of the total population (M. Anderson, 1984). By 1861, further marked increase in the numbers of spinsters allows calculation that 48.3% of the female population aged 20 years and

older was independent, including widows (Kranidis, 1999). The increase in the number of spinsters created public concern about the surplus of women to patriarchy's need, and to the reduced numbers of available marriageable men (M. Anderson, 1984; Hudson, 1995; Kranidis, 1999; Vicinus, 1985; Yeo, 2008). In the most often cited discussion of the problem, *Why are women redundant?*, a surplus of middle and upper class women is identified as the cause, explained by men's earlier emigration to the new colonies and women's reluctance to marry below their station (Greg, 1862). The recommended solutions were for the immediate shipping of 500,000 of the surplus women to the parts of the empire needing wives; and for those remaining in England to both lower their matrimonial sights and learn the skills of the women with besmirched reputations with whom England's bachelors were preferring to spend their time (Greg, 1862). With eerie similarity, Greg anticipated comments by an Australian twenty-first century public figure about the effects of male migration¹, making the same assumptions about women's marital aspirations and men's inclination to avoid these if alternative arrangements for achieving sexual satisfaction were available.

Greg's migration recommendations were not totally original. From the late seventeenth century, spinsters "of good behaviours, suitable as wives for soldiers and planters" (P. Sharpe, 2004, p. 64) had been actively encouraged by the East India Company to travel to India and wives already were joining husbands in the Empire's expansion. Migration was not a new concept for working class women who had moved *en masse* from country to town in search of work as changes in agricultural technology and practice took the jobs previously available to them. Working class women had also been in the vanguard of emigration when employment prospects in England vanished further with increasing competition for the dwindling number of occupations. From the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of women left Britain for the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the Cape of Good Hope, many with official assisted passage. This migration continued up until the 1930s when the number of women migrating far exceeded that of men (Kranidis, 1999).

¹ KPMG partner, Bernard Salt, was quoted on page 1 of *The West Australian*, 27 July 2005, describing a "man drought" caused by potential husbands leaving Australia to work overseas. "Men realise they don't have to commit and get to play the field, and the numbers are allowing them to get away with it," he said.

For independent women remaining in England, life could be grim. Previous early adoption by women of innovation and niche occupations gave way to a labour market gendered to privilege male status, prestige, and income (Hudson, 1995). While working class women were in demand for the low-paying, low-skilled occupations brought by industrialisation, or to domestic service, middle and upper class spinsters were confined to lives of dependence and marginalisation (Hudson, 1995): for example, 62% of dependents of the same age group as the male head of household in Victorian Lancashire were spinsters (Gordon & Nair, 2002). Paying positions they did secure were an extension of their domestic roles such as in education or nursing, or in the new, gendered, service trades such as office or shop work, yet middle-class spinsters were constantly admonished that their employment cost that of somebody more worthy of the opportunity (Cooper, 2001; Vicinus, 1985). As in previous times, many singlewomen came together in self-supporting communities, many of which were dedicated to women's successful independence through education and worthwhile employment (Vicinus, 1985).

As in previous times, widows enjoyed some privileges denied to spinsters and wives with a significant number operating *femme sole* in small business (Hudson, 1995). In a representative sample of Glaswegian households, Gordon and Nair (2002) found a rise in female-headed households from 23.0% (1851) to 40.0% (1891). Widows who were also providing a home for a broad range of female and male family members headed the great majority of these households.

From the mid-nineteenth century, women's voices were increasingly heard in the growing debates about social justice, culminating in the focussed agitation that achieved universal suffrage in the early twentieth century (some decades after its gradual introduction in the colonies). Recognising the fundamental role of religion in validating social arrangements and women's subjugation, many feminists argued for reclamation of the feminine that had been lost in the transition from Catholicism to the Protestant faith as the official state religion. Darwin's evolutionary theories were generalised to social organisation and notions of complementary feminine and masculine principles were promoted to legitimise women's claims to participatory public life. Around the end of the nineteenth century, an argument emerged from sociology that patriarchy had taken humanity as far as it was capable, requiring

matriarchy to move it to a higher level (Yeo, 2008). Feminist opposition to the 1860s' Contagious Diseases Acts that targeted female sex workers (many of whom were refugees from failed marriages with no income-generating alternative) while ignoring their male clients, saw their repeal in the 1880s (Horstman, 1985).

The impetus for change that improved wives' legal status from the mid to late nineteenth century also brought greater rights and opportunities for unmarried women and, by the end of the century, relational independence attracted women who previously would have been denigrated for their domestic status (Horstman, 1985). Unthinkable just a few decades previously, there was public debate about the value of marriage, the acceptability of divorce, the empowerment for women of freely-chosen celibacy and the importance of friendship as a valid intimate relationship (Vicinus, 1985). The "new woman" of the 1890s, with her self-sufficiency and reluctance to marry, attracted epithets questioning her femininity and appearance (Cooper, 2001) as the ideological elites tried to protect their status. At the turn of the century, 45.5% of spinsters were in paid employment and women in general seemed on the cusp of full civil status (Vicinus, 1985). The "modern girl" of women's magazines was synonymous with progress, self-sufficiency, and independence (Tinkler, 1995). Women seemed to be approaching ascendency.

4.4 Conclusion

The social status of women, in particular independent women, is in constant flux, underpinned by theological dogma used to validate prevailing political discourse and social organisation. From a state of grace in prehistoric times, through periods of legislated dependence, to occasional windows of opportunity for independence, women's lives have been framed by the vagaries of patriarchal economic, marital and religious prescription, underpinned by constant surveillance and control of their sexuality. The mirror that religion holds to structural ideology shows that the place of the feminine in belief systems parallels that in society. Nowhere is this more so than the millennia-long war still waged (e.g., Graves, 1972) to expunge the Great Goddess from collective consciousness and the feminine from theistic agency. Baring and Cashford (1991) ask us to consider whether the struggle of the oppositional feminine and masculine principles relate to the sacredness of their origin. There seems little doubt that the drive to replace the life-giving omnipresent

Mother in Her many manifestations with a single, remote masculine deity that endorses male privilege is of fundamental importance in the incessant campaign to control mortal women's lives. This was evident to the nineteenth century British feminists who sought the reinstatement of the feminine in dominant religion to validate aspirations for civil and occupational participation (Yeo, 2008).

Gendered power relations are vital for the maintenance of prevailing political and economic systems, and societal functioning. The independent woman is of sufficient threat to a patriarchal social order that she is identified for punitive attention whether this be through legislation outlawing her independence as in Classical times (Pomeroy, 1995) and in the late Middle Ages (Froide, 1999) or through denigratory public discourse in theatre, literature, science or mass media (e.g., Bennet & Froide, 1999; Demand, 2001; Hesiod, c. 800-700 BCE; Lanser, 1999; Rei, 2001; Showalter, 1978; Vicinus, 1985; Wiesner, 2000). Women's morality has been closely linked to the health of the nation (e.g., Greg, 1862; Joshel & Murnaghan, 2001), none more so than that of the unmarried woman whose comparative independence makes her less open to scrutiny than a wife.

Patriarchy is right to be concerned about women's threat to the mechanisms that support male privilege. Throughout the ages, when the opportunity arose, many women have chosen to take advantage of improved employment conditions to be self-supporting and to offer support to other women to enable their independence (e.g., Bahrani, 2001; Forth, 2008; Hanawalt, 1992; Hudson, 1995; Leyser, 1995). Where financial independence was limited by economic or class constraints, women turned to lives of chaste piety (e.g., Leyser, 1995) or prostitution (e.g., McNamara, 1985) to avoid conventional subjugation to a husband. Perhaps reinforcing male fears, women's economic deprivation is also related to increased marriage and fertility rates as competition for scarce employment persuades them that marriage has greater survival potential than that offered by the labour market (e.g., P. Sharpe, 1999; Wrigley, 1981).

Value systems do change over time, responding to changes in material, political and social structures (Duby, 1994). For example, romantic love, while no doubt present over the ages, was not a primary condition for marriage until the economic, political and social revolutions brought by the mechanisation of the means of production

(Gillis, 1985; Lantz, 1982). That mechanisation saw the demise of the family unit of production coupled with marked gendering of the labour market, ideological quarantining of women of the propertied classes to the private, domestic world to better manage the consumer goods that were the fruits of industrialisation's success, and an attendant, contradictory, valorising of individualism from the eighteenth century.

What better way to reduce opposition to appropriation of women's aspirations and property, and to persuade them to want to do so, than to dress marriage in a cloak of romantic love with its promise of devoted attention, erotic bliss and protective care. There were exceptions to the rule; for example, those women for whom remaining single was a political statement (Jefferies, 1997), but the vast majority internalised the imperative of the day. In the next chapter, I will contextualise this genealogy with reference to the experience of the independent Australian woman from European settlement to the present day.

