



Satellites  
Out of  
Orbit

chris wind

also by chris wind

*dreaming of kaleidoscopes*

*Paintings and Sculptures*

*Particivision and other stories*

*Excerpts*

*Thus Saith Eve* (ebook version of “Epistles”)

*UnMythed* (ebook version of “Myths”)

*Deare Sister* (ebook version of “Letters”)

*Soliloquies: The Lady Doth Indeed Protest* (ebook version of “Soliloquies”)

*Snow White Gets Her Say* (ebook version of “Fairy Tales”)

A performance version of “I am Eve” (notes for theatrical delivery of the text as a monologue set to an audio collage which can be heard at [www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net)—see *The Art of Juxtaposition*) is available from the author ([chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)). “I am Mary, Mother of God” is available as an audio piece on the same album.

A performance version of “The Portrait” (a Mozartean piano score with vocalise to accompany delivery of the text as a monologue) is available from the author ([chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)).

*As I the Shards Examine*, a theatrical version of this work with the soliloquies interwoven, is available for production; contact chris wind ([chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)) for the script.

Satellites  
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# Satellites Out of Orbit

chris wind

*Magenta*

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*Satellites Out of Orbit*

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To all the satellites out of orbit—

may the ones who will be

know the ones who have been.

And to benjie—

whose last three years were my happiest to date

and the ones spent writing this book.

It is possible, but rare, for a satellite to break out of its orbit around another (often larger) planetary body; such 'escape' requires a disturbance of the gravitational forces, and results, in essence, in a new environment for the satellite.

It is also possible, but also rare, for that satellite to then attract other planetary bodies: a close encounter between the satellite and another may result in a change of speed and/or direction for both.

Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex*

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## Note to Reader

The idea for and title of this book comes from Elizabeth Gould Davis, who, in *The First Sex*, refers to a “non-male-oriented female” as “a satellite out of orbit” (p.310).

This is fiction catalyzed by fact. It is not fiction supported by fact. What I mean by that is that the fiction is totally mine—I didn’t conjecture a reasonable fiction based on the facts: these pieces are not so much what the characters really would’ve said but what *I* think they *should’ve* said. And at first I thought I was simply imbuing the past with a contemporary perspective, but then of course I had to qualify that it was a contemporary feminist perspective, and now I recognize that it is my own individual feminist perspective. So in light of historical evidence, I may have misrepresented some of the characters. To those who are offended by perceived misrepresentation, my apologies. But since history is, in these cases, scanty, suspect of masculist bias, and sometimes outrightly contradictory (see especially the notes for “The Dialogue”), it is hard to know the extent of any misrepresentation. These women *might’ve* said what I want them to have said!

I’m especially concerned that readers realize that the letters (in “Letters”) are fictional; unlike in the other sections, the characters ‘writing’ the letters are real people. So let me state clearly that in no case did I uncover information implying that such a letter was written. In fact, I chose as characters people who, for whatever reasons, *probably didn’t* write such a letter, or any letter, or anything at all for that matter. Or if they did, it has not survived (at least, not in the easily accessible pre-internet mainstream). In this way then, I did not presume to speak for anyone who could and did speak for herself. Let me also say that in some cases, the person being written to wasn’t even known by the person writing (this is the case in “The Patent” —Catherine Greene and Cath-

erine II existed at the same time but that's it as far as I know); and in some cases, the person being written to doesn't even exist (I completely made up Benetta, Properzia's confidante in "The Stone" and Gawaina, Godiva's confidante and sister in "The Ride"). However, even though *the letters* and sometimes the epistolary relationship are fiction, in *all* cases *the event* giving rise to the letter and most of the events mentioned therein *are real*.

In most cases, I haven't mentioned the character's skin colour. I don't subscribe to the 'white unless otherwise stated' rule, so I hope you don't just assume that Little Red Riding Hood or Gaia or whoever is white. (I hope you didn't assume *I* was white.) (And why did you assume I was female?) The reason I seldom mention skin colour is because I want to help create a world where it is as irrelevant as hair colour (which I have also seldom mentioned).

At the end of the book, there is a brief synopsis of each character's 'real' story, followed by a list of references used. This serves to provide background information which sometimes enhances appreciation and might, therefore, be better read before the piece; it also enables readers to realize just what's fact and what's fiction.

One last thing: the pieces of this book were written over the course of three years (1985-1988). I realized by the end that I really didn't want to focus exclusively on women; for a long time, I had lamented the injuries to *both* genders of sex stereotyping. My first thought was that I must rewrite the book. But then I thought what if my perspective changes again and I feel I have to rewrite the rewrite? I decided that my time and energy would be better spent starting another book. (Though it would make an interesting study—to have, to read, the 'same' piece rewritten by a single person throughout their lifetime. I actually considered doing that—rewriting a story every five years, and when I was sixty or seventy, publishing all the versions in one book—but, well, I never got around to it . . . ) I did, however, go back and write a few poems about male mythological characters, which is why that section, and that section alone, includes some men. And I did wonder if records of real men who broke out of their preordained orbit are scarce because such men are few and far between or because records of their existence have been similarly ignored, distorted, or destroyed . . .

I

EPISTLES



# I am Eve

the bad girl, the evil woman.

I stand accused, and sentenced. Without a trial. For life.

Because of my single action, millions of individuals have been born with ‘original sin’, have been guilty even before they acted, doomed before they started. I alone have been held responsible<sup>1</sup> for this sad and pathetic fallen race. Therefore, let me begin by correcting this: if I were free not to fall in the first place, they were free not to fall after me; and if I were not free, then I can’t be held responsible—for my fall or theirs.

Now, let us further examine the charges, let us correctly define that action.

I have been condemned for choosing knowledge over ignorance: the fruit I ate came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In a society that praises pursuit of knowledge and honours men of wisdom, why have I been viewed with disfavour? Had Adam reached out first, would he have been so rebuked? Or is the state of ignorance requisite for women only? (Histories pass *on* Socrates, they pass *over* Aspasia.)

In the same vein, I chose experience over innocence. In a context of attitudes that value experience, the disapproval of my action can only imply the desire that women, like children, live in a state of innocence.

I have also been condemned for disobedience. If that were the issue, then why wasn’t the tree so named—‘the tree of obedience and disobedience’ or ‘the tree of temptation’. By naming it what it was not, God either deliberately tempted me or deliberately deceived me. And *he* should be judged, not I.

---

<sup>1</sup> Even though Adam was beside me through it all (Gen 3:6) and made not one objection. And, of course, also ate the fruit.

Perhaps though, the tree really was a tree of knowledge. In that case, one should wonder what insecurities led God to prefer obedience over knowledge. Indeed, one should wonder why he went so far as to forbid knowledge. The reason is evident in Genesis (3:22-23): he didn't want us to equal him. He sent us out of Eden to prevent our eating from the tree of life, because already we were as wise for having eaten from the tree of knowledge, and if we had made it to the tree of life before he found us, we would've been immortal as well—we would've been as godly.

And that takes me onward, for counted among my sins is that of pride. Considering that later, through his son, God commands us to 'follow in his footsteps', I find the label of pride odd for the action that would do just that—make me like God. Furthermore, I find it odd to be condemned for being like God when, after all, he created us in his image (Gen 1:26-27). And God certainly is proud: to create us in his image can be called narcissistic, and to prefer us to spend our time admiring him rather than learning about him is equally evidence of pride. (As an aside, I would think that my knowledge would increase my admiration; that wasn't why I ate the fruit, but if it was, would it have mattered? Did God ever ask my intent?)

I have also been charged with a lack of faith. Yet I took it on faith in the first place that God told us not to eat from the tree: remember, he gave the command to Adam before I even existed (Gen 2:16-17).<sup>2</sup> Further, I had faith in the serpent, I trusted the serpent to be telling the truth. Is it dishonourable to trust?

And is it reprehensible to act on that trust, as I did then in offering the fruit to another, to Adam? God commanded innocence, then held me responsible for an act of innocent intent. For how could I know my faith was misplaced? How could I know the serpent was evil until I had knowledge of good and evil? By telling us not to eat of the tree, he insisted on ignorance—but then held us responsible, for an act of ignorance.

Lastly, I have been condemned for using my reason, for it is through the exercise of reason that I decided to eat the fruit. The serpent's explanation of

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<sup>2</sup> I don't rule out the possibility that the command therefore was meant only for Adam—God knew that knowledge in the hands of men is a dangerous thing.

God's motives, that the knowledge of good and evil would make us godly and he didn't want us to equal him (Gen 3:5), seemed very reasonable to me. God's command on the other hand, not even to touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because then I'd die, seemed so very unreasonable. Where is the fault in using that faculty given to me by God? The fault is not mine, but God's: he made reason guide our will and left our reason prey to deceit.

Or did he? History has it that the serpent's words were false, that I was deceived. But God's words after the fact (Gen 3:22 "Behold, the man is become as one of us") verify the serpent's prediction (Gen 3:5 "Ye shall be as gods"): the serpent was telling the truth.<sup>3</sup> And so I stand condemned, for listening to truth. And for offering that truth to others.

---

<sup>3</sup> And in fact God lied: he said we would die (Gen 3:3) if we touched the fruit of that tree, and we didn't—at least not for several hundred years.



# I am Lilith

and the records show that because I stole Adam's sperm and made demons with it, I was exiled from the garden.

Why? I mean, what aspect of my behaviour was the criminal one? Was it the taking and doing without the other's consent? Surely not: every seventeen minutes some man rapes a woman. And that's certainly doing without the other's consent, as well as taking,<sup>1</sup> and none of them is exiled.

Or was it because I took his sperm, because I was a woman who took reproductive control away from a man? Well, let me mention the unavailability of abortion, as well as the unavailability of safe and effective contraception, as well as rape: all of these have taken reproductive control away from women. And let me mention test tube babies, in vitro reproduction, and surrogate motherhood: all of these depend on medical knowledge, money, and authorization, all of which are for the most part controlled by men.

Or was it the fact that I made demons from the sperm? Well, this is interesting: all of a sudden men are interested in what happens to their sperm? They never used to be: most men don't worry about contraception; most men don't assist with abortion, financially or emotionally; many don't assist with parenting, financially (child support payments are seldom made after the first two years) or in any other way (what's the average number of hours per week a father spends with his child?); and I don't see much (male) governmental interest in daycare centres, programs to assist single parents, and so on.

But whatever the reason, go ahead, sentence me to exile. I will gladly live wherever you are not.

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<sup>1</sup> No, not virginity—I had in mind something far more important: women who have been raped have that taken-for-granted freedom from fear, that basic trust in others that we need to carry on with our lives, taken from them.



# I am Abel

and I was the tiller of the soil. Cain was the one into slaughtering animals, not me.

Keeping livestock, to catch and kill from time to time, is a predictable refinement of the hunting activity of his Neanderthal ancestors. Just as farming is a refinement of the seed-gathering and root-digging of my ancestors.<sup>1</sup> And he said he liked the challenge, denying that it was murder on the basis that the animals were an inferior life form. Nevertheless, I said it was still killing, and accused him of being power-hungry, insensitive, and sadistic (he doesn't always knock them out before he slits their throats). And that's partly how it started.

To digress, I can see the hunting of old as a little more justified: I mean, it got the men out of the way so the women could carry on with the more important things (bearing and teaching children, building houses, healing, inventing tools, as well as, of course, providing food<sup>2</sup>), and it was harmless enough (only the most egotistic and immature ever got injured<sup>3</sup>) (and then, well, in a way, it was just as well; if they got killed, however, we were sad nevertheless), and the chase was a good outlet for their aggression and violent energy. But as I explained to Cain, I couldn't see any reason for human beings of our kind to carry on such a practice.

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<sup>1</sup> A footnote for those of you who are surprised: the men, always eager to be off, were never in one place long enough to realize the connections between seeds, earth, water, sun, growth; the women, on the other hand, eager not to be off (on the move with babies inside and out was not at all easy), would naturally be the ones then to 'discover' and develop agriculture. So, in the tradition of my sex, I, Abel, was the first farmer.

<sup>2</sup> We did not depend on meat for survival (in fact, most of us refused to eat it): they'd follow an animal for days, sometimes weeks, and often come back empty-handed; and even if they did catch something, the meat went bad so quickly (often by the time they brought it back, it was spoiling)—so it really wasn't a reliable enough source to even bother adapting to.

<sup>3</sup> And as I implied above, few animals actually got caught and killed (and most often, it was the ill or the old—they were almost giving euthanasia then, not hunting).

And his version of it—capturing and imprisoning the animals, and then raising them in total captivity, killing them when the odds are so impossibly against their defence (if they'd never been wild, they'd never learned how to fight back) and their escape (he'd not only catch one when it was trapped inside his fences, but he'd kill it when it was tied up and completely powerless)—well, his version was downright sick. I mean it couldn't be justified by dietary necessity, and even if I did accept 'challenge' as a valid reason, I couldn't in any way call what he did challenging.<sup>4</sup>

But to go back, I said that my criticism of Cain's activity was partly how it started. I shall explain the 'partly' first: I wasn't the only one displeased with Cain's idea of worthwhile occupation—why do you think God favoured my sacrifices and not his? (Remember things got a little backwards in the passing on: contrary to popular opinion, God did not favour the animal sacrifices, he favoured Abel's sacrifices, and I, you remember, was the farmer.) God was trying to tell him he didn't appreciate seeing the animals he created, slaughtered—in his name, no less. He thought the practice a perverse and confused sense of tribute. To say the least.

The 'it', of course, is the conflict between Cain and me, between male and female. It's in the interests of patriarchy to erase evidence of such conflict: since they couldn't erase my death (at Cain's hand), the next best solution was to change my sex, 'reducing' the episode to 'mere' murder of one man by another—and effectively erasing the beginning, the archetype, of the conflict between the sexes.<sup>5</sup> We are taught, therefore, that women have (always) agreed with men—never differed, never argued, never criticized; that we have, in the past, accepted—even acquiesced to—the male nature. This lesson effectively eliminates any feeling of strength female descendants would derive from knowing they were not the first, not the only ones to be displeased, disappointed,

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<sup>4</sup> I understand the practice of hunting (catching and killing animals in the way of our ancestors) has experienced a resurrection in our descendants—the males, that is. I find this odd: perhaps it is a sign of regression, for surely there is no need (unless the art of agriculture has been forgotten—and I suppose that since many of the skills originated and developed by women have been forgotten, this is a possibility), and surely men are not still (again) so inferior that the women welcome and justify the temporary release of their burdensome presence, so perhaps the challenge has increased and become irresistible—though I expect that the continued development of weapons would not make this likely.

<sup>5</sup> By the way, something else that got a bit mixed up—or changed: it was then that we (they) were expelled from the garden; it's obvious that Cain's action, not Eve's, was responsible for the fall of humanity.

dissatisfied with the male kind. Furthermore, having to start anew each time, establishing reasonable grounds (evidence, arguments) for that dissatisfaction, wastes energy and time, deferring and deterring any action toward amending (male) faults and inferiorities.

However, as you can understand now, the Cain and Abel episode was not merely the first murder; it was the first episode of centuries of violence by men against women.<sup>6</sup> Men continued to kill women: they burned, drowned, boiled, butchered, hung, and stoned them; they raped them; they beat them; they discouraged them; they denied them; they degraded them. In a thousand different ways, men have carried on what Cain started: they have created a tradition of violence against women.

And that is the mark of Cain: the curse of testosterone, the curse of that deformed X, their Y, chromosome. That is the curse, the mark, of being male.

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<sup>6</sup> And his sneering question, 'Am I my sister's keeper?' was the archetypal, the first, renunciation of responsibility of male towards female. And yet we have never—though provoked by spite, anger, envy, revenge, desperation—we have never forsaken our responsibility toward them: we suckle our male infants as we do our females, we care for them, we teach them, we bond with them—we love them.



# I am Cain's Wife

My existence is not acknowledged. It would be too disturbing.

My screams are never heard, my bruises never seen. And whether I limp, or cower, or run, or fight, or cry, or accuse, or ignore, or hide, or pretend, or forget, or remember—it's all the same: I am condemned. For being weak, for being strong, for provoking, for exaggerating, for lying, for telling the truth, for being masochistic, for being inferior, for leaving, for staying. I am the first battered wife.

I am silenced. I am invisible.

I am not.



## I am Noah's Wife

That's it. Jus' Noah's wife. Mrs. Noah. A no-name person. My sons have names. Shem, Ham, Japheth. And my grandsons have names. Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, Canaan, Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram. But me I don' have a name. I'm jus'—Noah's wife.

That's why I'm here. To set the record straight. See everybody's got me pegged as mean an' a hen-pecker somethin' fierce. Especially hilarious is the time where I refused to get on the ark. Well lemme tell you, that weren't a bit funny. There's a few things you don' know about all that. Why d'ya think Noah wanted me so bad on the ark? Love? Pah. Now that's funny. That man never loved me.

No siree, he wanted me on the ark because I was the one gonna look after all them animals. I was the one gonna clean their shit, feed their mouths, tend their litters, nurse their sick. What did ya think, Noah was goin' to? No, he was gonna be too busy navigatin', I can tell you that. Noah was gonna stand there like he always has, givin' orders and tellin' us they came from God. So that means I was suppose to look after him too. (My sons? Well, they each had a wife. Yup, there was Shem's wife, Ham's wife, and Japheth's wife.)

An' I was suppose to look after the ark—jus' you think about keepin' that thing clean and healthy: 300 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits—that's long as a football field and three stories high! (An' only one window—lord, what a stench!) See he figured me to be game warden, housekeeper, and cook (an' we ain't jus' talkin' a week, we're talkin' close on two months)—an' all the while me in a state of constant pregnancy. No thanks.

An' that's just what I woulda got—no thanks, no pay, no credit. If the flood destroyed the world an' all its people, where d'ya think alla you came from? Me! An' I ain't even given a name. To read The Bible you'd think he begat alla you hisself. An' you'd think he begat only sons. Well it ain't so.

An' if that ain't enough, when it was all over, God made his covenant with the men. Oh I knew he would. 'Course he includes me, I suppose, if us women come in under “the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you”. Flatterin', hunh.

# I am Hagar

and according to legend, I am the first victim of female circumcision. That should read the first ‘volunteer-victim’. But before I explain the volunteer part, let me expand on the victim part.

The men (for in a sense, they are the victors) have given us lots of reasons in their desperate attempt to justify this barbarous, this painful and dangerous, practice. One of the more ridiculous rests on the beliefs that orgasm depends on the clitoris and that orgasm prevents conception (the heat of our passion destroys the sperm); since the prevailing attitude about women was that we were breeders (well, the prevailing attitude about handmaids, at least), then having a clitoris (and therefore orgasm and therefore no conception/pregnancy) rendered us useless—unable to fulfill our rightful function. So, it was better to cut it off.

Another reason, just as ridiculous and just as related to conception as the *raison d’être* of women’s sexuality (of women, period), was that the clitoris could grow so large that it interfered with intercourse (thereby interfering with conception).

There are other more insidious reasons, one of which is that uncircumcised women are overly sexed and therefore unfaithful and unchaste. This one backfired rather quickly when men realized that it was the hormonal chemicals and not the clitoris that gave us our drive, and not having a clitoris just made us less easily satisfied (and often, therefore, more unfaithful).

Continuing along this line of considering women’s pleasure, it’s been suggested that men envy women’s pleasure because it’s greater than theirs; a clitoridectomy reduces the woman’s pleasure without reducing the man’s

(well, at least those men whose pleasure is entirely self-centred). It's also been suggested that men are upset not that women experience greater pleasure, but that they experience pleasure at all: we're supposed to be sex objects, not subjects, and if a woman feels pleasure from sex, maybe she wasn't made for men after all. Maybe men were made for her!

We could go even further: perhaps it has nothing to do with denying women's pleasure, but with providing men's pleasure (or, it's not about causing women pleasure, but about causing them pain). There are a lot of sadistic men who get pleasure from inflicting pain, and this is a very good way to do it. We are not rubbed first with the leaf (a local anaesthetic), and the knife they use is often dull. The risk of infection (which has its own pain) is high because nothing is very clean.

As I said, the men have given us lots of reasons (for we never tire of asking why). But perhaps the real reason comes from the women themselves. And this is why I volunteered. It's simple really: you recall (Gen 17) that God made a special covenant, a special promise of nations, kings, and land; but he made it with only a certain few—only the circumcised were to receive the benefits of his promise. Well, we women felt left out and discriminated against; we too wanted a legacy and land to live on. So we demanded circumcision in order to be included among the Chosen. Quite simply, we demanded an equal opportunity.

Instead of a good opportunity.

## I am Zipporah

When God told my husband what preparations the people had to make before he'd appear to them on Mount Sinai, it was very clear that 'the people' meant only the men: first of all, Moses didn't even bother to tell any of us, the women, what was going on; and second, one of those preparations was "come not at your wives" (Ex 19:15)—women don't have wives, do they? So—and I'll say this loud and clear—the Ten Commandments are for men only. God gave them to men. They are intended for men.

Let's look at the Third Commandment, for instance: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but on the seventh day thou shalt not do any work. Now this commandment is impossible for women to follow: much of our work—childcare especially—cannot be ignored ever, let alone for a whole day, on a regular and scheduled basis. I can just hear us try: "Now kids listen up, tomorrow is the Sabbath, so you there with the chubby little legs, give up on trying to walk tomorrow because if you fall down, I can't pick you up and get you going again, no, you'll just have to lie there, face in the floor, all day; and you, if the boys around the corner beat you up tomorrow, well, too bad; and you over there in the crib, try not to mess tomorrow okay, because I can't change your diaper; and you, the one with the thousand questions a minute, tomorrow, don't you wonder 'bout a thing.'

And Number Six: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Women didn't have to be told this. We knew that another man's child would be disowned (if not killed) by our husbands, so monogamy was a very practical-ethical practice, know what I mean? The men, however, they didn't have that concern; their concern for children generally extended only to their own (even though they

couldn't ever be sure just which ones those were, that's always been kinda funny—remember Hambone?—never mind); and since venereal disease was an epidemic, this commandment was on the list. Their list.

Number Seven: Thou shalt not steal. Now why would we steal something when we weren't allowed to own anything? Makes no sense to steal property when you are property.

Number Eight: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. This is another silly one for women: we were non-persons, we weren't allowed to bear any witness, false or true.

And Number Ten: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife. I don't think he was talking to the lesbians among us.

So, now, I thought that since those Commandments were for men only, we could make our own, you know, for women only. For starters, I propose the following list. Pass it around, discuss it with your coffee klatch, your consciousness-raising group, your collective; and revise, refine, add, delete, substitute; then when we reach agreement, together we'll weave them into a tapestry of scarlet and gold.

Preamble: These commandments are neither abstracts nor absolutes, and are to be interpreted according to your own context and circumstance.

1. Seek to maximize the joy of life for yourself and others.
2. Temper justice with mercy and compassion, at all times calling upon your reason and your feeling to guide you.
3. Never love unconditionally—human sacrifice has never been blessed.
4. Remember that the basis of morality is care and communication.
5. Act in accordance to the rule of reciprocity: if you give, you are entitled to get; and if you get, you are obligated to give. This applies to all relationships—person to person, people to people, people to planet.
6. Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand: exercise your rights only to the extent that you take the responsibilities that go with them.

7. Make your choices carefully, for no choice is without consequence.
8. Remember that peace involves freedom, and freedom involves compromise.

(We don't need ten. These eight'll do it.)



# I am the certain woman

who killed Abimelech. Pathetic Abimelech who, after I delivered that deadly blow, “called hastily unto the young man his armour bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him” (Judges 9:54). I am thus the real reason men of all nations refuse to allow women into their front lines (or do so only with great reluctance or great desperation).

It is not an issue of competence, as we first thought, or of economics, as they then argued, or even of mere tradition. What’s at stake is the army itself. Our presence would destroy the precious boys’ club aura, it would devalue membership: if even a woman can make it through basic training, then what’s the big deal?<sup>1</sup> Being a soldier would have the same status as being a teacher<sup>2</sup> (or, if enough of us joined, as being a secretary).

But most importantly, our presence would make it possible for male soldiers, for men, to be killed by women. This ever-present possibility (for you’d never really know) of such ‘disgrace’ would shatter the heroism of death in battle—and it’s only that heroism that makes sense of being in the army at all, it’s only that heroism that makes young men agree to kill and be killed: take that away and you’ve taken away their armies. (Hm...)

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<sup>1</sup> Most men haven’t realized that basic training is in fact designed so that your very average man can make it: the military wants to keep recruits, not let them go. (Well, they want to keep as many as they need, so actually the standards rise and fall accordingly.) In fact, the average IQ of the front line soldier is 85-90. You may want to argue that that front line soldier is physically superior though. I’m afraid not. Studies show, contrary to the popular opinion that ‘brains’ are ‘wimps’ and ‘jocks’ are ‘dumb’, that physical and mental abilities correlate: someone whose intelligence is below average probably has below average physical abilities (endurance, strength, flexibility, co-ordination) and vice-versa—the best athletes are typically the most intelligent ones.

<sup>2</sup> a field populated by both men and women



# I am Delilah

arch-castrator. They say I took away Samson's strength. They say if it wasn't for me, he might still be alive. I say Samson was a very sick man. He was selfish and sadistic and a mass-murderer. He was better off dead. You know it and I know it. But still he's the hero and I'm the bitch.

His parents should've had him hospitalized from the start. I mean, he sees a woman one day and decides he wants to have her, doesn't even know her. So he goes to his parents and says "Get her for me to wife, now" (Judges 14:2). What normal son speaks to his parents this way? (And why didn't he get her himself?)

After a little while, he gives her away. She's probably glad—I merely mention it as further evidence of his bent mind: you just don't give your wife away.

Later he kills thirty men because they had pressured his wife into telling them the answer to a stupid riddle. Killed them. Thirty.

Then there's that bit with the foxes. He catches 300 foxes, ties them together by their tails, puts sticks in between, then sets them on fire. You've never heard such a howling and screaming.

He let them go in the corn fields of the Philistines, and when they found out, they burned his ex-wife and her father. (A real logical and heartfelt response. Admittedly just as sick.) This, Samson sees as reason to cause more pain and death, so he goes on another slaughterous rampage.

When the Philistines come to get him in order to kill him, his own people agree to deliver him. Now if that's not an indication that the man was a danger to society, I don't know what is.

However, Samson breaks his binds and kills another thousand men. After

that, he heads to Gaza. Which is where I live. Now we, of course, have heard about him; we know what's coming. He'll see a woman, insist on having her whether she wants him or not, and then sooner or later, with or without pretext, he'll start killing a lot of people. So when the Philistines came to me (my work as a spy was well-known to them), I was more than willing to take on the assignment.

Now the big red herring about Samson is that his strength came from his hair. This is true only insofar as his hair is a symbol of his religious faith. Recall that's why he never cut it: he was a Nazarite and it was custom for them to grow it long. Samson was a 'believer'. Remember, when he broke free, it was after 'calling upon the Lord' as it were; probably the bit about tearing down the gates of the city was with the same 'assistance'.

So what I had to do was pretty clear. And pretty easy. His faith was inherited: it was acquired by birth, not by reason—it was what we call 'unexamined'. So all I had to do was force him to examine it. When he did, it disappeared. And, well, without that maniacal religious fervour, he lost a lot of his personal strength. Thus they were able to apprehend him and imprison him.

But, you say, in prison his hair grew back, and then he regained his strength, so it was the hair and not the faith. No, in prison his faith returned, and thus his strength. Notice that for that last feat (Judges 16:28-29), he called on God once more.

So why did he believe again? Well, his kind of faith is like—it's like taking steroids: it pumps you up and makes you strong. It's a faith of the weak; the strong don't need it. That's why 'conversion' happens when people are down and out, when all they ever had or all they ever were is taken away. And remember, at that time Samson had just been blinded. For a man like him, that'll do it.

## I am Eshta

Elona is dead. Do you hear me? She is dead! Look at me—you know me—my father and I live in Gebiah—that is—I no longer live with my father. Perhaps you know—let me—I must tell you—Oh my God, Elona is dead!

When it began—no, I mean when it happened—to me, I mean, in our home—I—

One evening. My father came home from working in the fields. He had with him a stranger. A Levite man. And his concubine. They were passing through, on their way home, from Bethlehem-Judah. And needed a place. To stay. For the night. My father, a very kind and generous man—oh so kind and generous—offered our house and made them our guests.

So I showed the woman, Elona, I showed Elona to my room which I would, which I thought I would share with her for the night. And then we began to prepare a supper. While we were peeling and cutting, Elona told me her name, and I learned a bit about her sad life. She was the man's concubine unwillingly. Her father had given her to the man years ago, and she discovered, very quickly, that he was a violent man, and he often hit her, and beat her. She managed to escape, but had nowhere to go, except back to her father's house. So she travelled, alone, back to her home in Bethlehem-Judah, hoping that once her father found out that the man he had given her to was cruel, he would welcome her back and let her stay. But her father did not believe her. And after a few fortnights, the man, enraged and humiliated by her leaving, came after her. He appeared very friendly and reasonable, and her father rejoiced more to see him than he had to see his own daughter.

How it made her feel—to see her father so kind and generous to the man who beat her. Her father entertained him, for seven days and seven nights, giving him their best wine and food. Eventually they left, Elona with her ‘husband’ and they headed back to Ephraim. On their way, they passed through our town, Gibeah, and as they had no place to stay, my father offered our house.

I did not like the man too much, but I tried to be kind to him so not to make it worse for Elona. I was thinking perhaps somehow her misery could end, and all through the meal I was wondering—what could be done? We ate, and then as Elona and I cleaned up, my father and the man sat, and talked, and drank. My father began to get a little drunk. This is often his way. Elona was not surprised to see her husband red-faced as well.

It was perhaps an hour after we had supped that we heard a clamour and banging at our door. Elona and I were in my room, talking. I listened carefully, and realized that there were several men at our door. By their accent I could tell they were sons of Belial, and fear rose in me. I hoped my father would make them go away, but I heard them insist on seeing the man we had lodged, Elona’s husband. My father refused, respecting the custom of protecting guests, but to my horror I heard him say, “But I have a daughter, a virgin, and the man’s concubine is here too”—he was laughing—“I will give them to you instead and you can humble them, do with them as you wish” (Judges 19:24). I could not believe it! “Quick,” Elona said to me, “let us run and hide!” Being nearest the window, she pushed me through first, and I stood waiting in the dark, still disbelieving what I’d heard, but—but before Elona could follow me through the window, I heard my father burst into the room. He must’ve grabbed Elona for she cried out, and I heard him ask, “Where is Eshta?!” I heard her answer “I don’t know” and moments later I heard the men cheer and ride off. I stayed there in the dark, until my father and the man passed out. Then I went back into my room, quickly gathered what I would need, and escaped. I tried to find Elona but of course I knew not where to look.

Two days later, speaking to women in Jebus, I discovered that Elona had been raped to death. She had managed to crawl back to our house and in the

morning when the man opened the door to leave, he saw her lying on the step. “Up and let us be going” was all he said (Judges 19:28). But she did not move. She was dead.

Soon after, I happened to be at a gathering in Mizpeh. The people of Israel were very angry because Elona had been killed, and I heard her husband speak, blaming the men who had raped her, not admitting that he had consented to give her to them, to save himself. I was shocked! I stood up to tell them what had really happened, but everyone began shouting, no one would believe me.

And I knew then that they also would not believe me if I told them that a father, a ‘good’ man, could value the life of a stranger, a man he just met, more than that of his own daughter.



# I am Ruth

and I am a virtuous woman. At least in the eyes of a certain man (Ruth 3:11).  
Let me tell you what men call 'virtuous' in a woman.

One night I curled up at his feet to sleep, like a cute little puppy. I accepted being equal with a piece of land. Actually, I was lower than the land, for whoever bought it, got me in the deal—not vice versa.

And I smiled, sweetly, through it all.

And that's called being a virtuous woman.



# I am the Queen of Sheba

and I am not impressed. Remember my visit to Solomon, that most revered King of Israel? Oh I know, you thought I went away full of respect and admiration. That's what you were supposed to think. Then, not now. Then, well, if I had told him I thought his priorities immoral and his policies shallow and ineffectual, well, I would've put the lives of my queendom in danger: he would've attacked, like most leaders, provoked by mere insult and offensive opinion. But now, now the truth can be spoken.

Solomon was praised for his wealth and his wisdom. Well, the first part is accurate, for what this wisest of kings values most is gold. He drinks out of gold cups, he shoots at gold targets, he fights with gold shields, he sits on a gold throne . . . He also has a fondness for ivory and pure linen, cedar, stone, and brass.<sup>1</sup>

What he values next is food. He has divided his kingdom into twelve areas, one for each month for the year; during 'their month', each area must provide food for Solomon and his court. Most areas spend the whole year in preparation for that month, for Solomon's provision for one day was "thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meat, ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl" (1 Kings 4:22-23). Since a land can produce only so much, it isn't hard to figure out what's left over for the people.

Also high on his list of priorities is military power. He has 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and 12,000 horsemen. That's enough to conquer every

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<sup>1</sup> His house is incredibly extravagant, lavishly decorated with brasswork of cherubim, palm trees, lion, oxen, and row upon row of lilies and pomegranates. His wife's house is the same.

neighbouring nation not just once but twenty times. And since any conquered nation takes at least ten years to rebuild to strength, this amount of force is simply superfluous—it's overkill. His 'defence' policy is based on incredible paranoia and insecurity, and it's a ridiculous waste of man-ability.

Let's look at another example of his questionable policy-making. His idea of a job creation program is to build a magnificent house—in the name of the Lord, of course. Oh sure, he created 180,000 jobs. But one, the jobs created were in only three sectors of the market—woodcutters, carriers, and stone hewers (sectors dominated by men); and two, the end product (after seven years) was one building—to house no one. Not a very wise use of resources, to say the least.

But then, Solomon simply was not a very wise man. As for his judgments, his only claim to fame was that of a custody conflict—two women declared a child to be their own. His proposal to cut the child in half revealed the true mother as the one who cried out for the child's life to be spared even if it meant giving it to the other. Well, it was a neat solution. But it wasn't his. During the recess just before the judgment, he met with his mother, Bathsheba, in his chambers—it was her idea.<sup>2</sup>

As for his proverbs, consider the following, perhaps his most famous:

To everything, there is a season,  
and a time to every purpose under the heaven  
A time to be born, and a time to die  
A time to plant,  
and a time to pluck up that which is planted  
A time to kill, and a time to heal  
A time to break down,  
and a time to build up  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh

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<sup>2</sup> If you recall that she was the one responsible for Solomon's becoming King in the first place (if she hadn't gone to David to speak for her son, he would never have been appointed), this will not surprise you. Also, that kind of solution would work only with women: men (like Abraham) will sacrifice their own child in order to fulfil a principle, but women choose to sacrifice the principle (in this case, truth) instead of a person—and only a woman would realize that difference.

A time to mourn, and a time to dance  
    A time to cast away stones,  
    and a time to gather stones together  
    A time to embrace,  
and a time to refrain from embracing  
    A time to get, and a time to lose  
A time to keep, and a time to cast away  
    A time to rend, and a time to sew  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak  
    A time to love, and a time to hate  
    A time of war, and a time of peace.

By saying everything, it says nothing. Like many of his 'words of wisdom', these are perfectly empty of substance. Solomon does not, can not, answer the important questions: When is the time to give birth, to be born? What seeds do we plant, and where do we build up? Why must there be a time to kill? Who do we embrace and love? How long is the time to keep silence? And how do we achieve that time of peace?



# I am Vashti

Would you like to hear a good story? Come here then, I've got a good one. Listen, this is what happened.

One night my friends and I were partying (women friends—we never invited any men and so they always had to party by themselves—which was just as well since their parties are so boring, have you ever been? I say, when two or more men gather together, all they do is tell lies about themselves and see who can drink the most).

Anyway, to continue, we were all having a right good time when suddenly my husband's servants barged in and announced that Ahasuerus had commanded my presence. Well, I ignored them of course. And what a stir ensued! Really, there was so very much ado about—well would you have gone?

First and foremost, I was simply having too good of a time. Amartia was right in the middle of one of her most delightful, most artful, most brilliant story-plays, and I didn't want to leave. Second, I consider only requests, not commands. Third, the command came from Ahasuerus, a person I seldom pay attention to in the best of circumstances. Fourth, I knew he and his friends would be drunk and I had no desire to enter into their company, let alone risk the consequences. Fifth, I knew he wanted to show me off—well I'm not a piece of property. Sixth, I knew he wanted to put my beauty on display, and I refuse to participate in glorifying something so trivial—and something so accidental: I mean, look, when it comes right down to it, beauty is quite beyond one's personal choice and control, isn't it? So such compliments are either an indication of confused stupidity (to offer credit where no credit can be due) or an insult (to thus ignore one's character, which, since that is

within one's choice and control, is a more appropriate cause for compliment). So, I did the same as you, I'll bet: I stayed where I was, ate another cranberry chocolate, and listened to Amartia finish her fantastic tale.

Now, this is the good part, the result of my oh-so-radical action of not heeding my husband's command to appear before him: quite simply, the men became afraid—and got together to make a law—requiring women to obey their husbands (Esther 1:20). Can you imagine? Well, we laughed! Oh did we ever have a time of that one! Tears in our eyes, every last one of us, and Bertha, why Bertha was quite senseless on the floor, rolling and holding her stomach—every time she'd look at one of us, she'd start all over again with the most hideous, most irresistible horselaugh—Of course, since the law was made without our consent, it continues to exist without our allegiance.

And our next party is a fortnight from now. You'll come, won't you?

# I am Judith

and you won't find my story in your Bible. But before I explain why, let me tell you my story. It's simple, really. General Holofernes was sent by the king (Nebuchadnezzar) to punish all of us in the West for refusing to support him in his war against the Medes. And most of the western nations 'accepted' the killing and destruction. Most, I said. Not us. We were a small group of Israelites living in the mountains of Judah, who refused to take this 'punishment' lying down. As a result, General Holofernes invaded and succeeded in occupying the small town of Bethulia. Bethulia was our lifeline and this occupation put us in a cul-de-sac. The General intended to simply wait until our water ran out. And our men decided to wait until God intervened on our behalf. But eventually, and understandably, people got impatient with waiting, and began even to doubt. So the men decided to wait for only five more days and then take action, with or without divine assistance. Though I felt quite angry at them for presuming to give God an ultimatum, I did think they were on the right track to consider taking responsibility for themselves. But I did more than consider it.

One evening, I spent a little extra time and attention before going out. So I was dressed to kill, as it were, when I allowed myself to be captured. Predictably, the General couldn't take his eyes off me. And after a few days of tantalizing distance, he invited me to his tent for a party for two. Also predictably, trying to be impressive, he got drunk and passed out. I killed him, and then returned to my people; in the morning it was easy for us to slaughter an army caught by surprise without its leader.

So why, you wonder, isn't my story, the Book of Judith, in The Bible? Why do the Catholics consider it deuterocanonical? The Protestants, apocryphal?

And the Jews, well, they don't acknowledge it at all. Is it because I committed cold-blooded, pre-meditated, first-degree murder? No, that's quite acceptable. Is it because I took things into my own hands instead of trusting to God? No, that's been done time and time before; and even if it isn't always condoned, at least the tales are told. Why then? I'll tell you.

One thing is that my story shows that I, a woman, who so deceived, murdered, and thus saved my country, could be more male than men. I crossed the lines that separate men and women, lines upon which male identity and value depend (so bound to their sex is their identity and value).

But I think the more important thing is this: men (and it's men who edit The Bible) don't want their stupidity publicized: they don't want it to be told that they can be so easily manipulated, that their behaviour in the presence of beauty is so boringly predictable. They don't want it revealed that in truth, women can have more power than men, that beauty can have more influence than military strategy or physical prowess.

And it's too bad. I mean, if the tale were told, perhaps men would learn (and isn't that a purpose of The Bible, to teach?): perhaps they would learn to be influenced by, to invest power in, not another's appearance, but the other's character.

# I am Mary

mother of God. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now—it's immortalized. I am indelibly identified by my relationship to a male: all of me has been denied, except that one part. And yet even that part has not been accorded full status: I am the mother of God! It's a relation whose ramifications no one seems to recognize, to credit.

My existence became important, became worthy of mention, only after (only because) Christ became important and worth mention. My childhood, my girlhood, is never looked at, and yet it was my life before Christ that was responsible for my being the mother of God in the first place: I was favoured (Luke 1:28, 30), I was chosen because of the goodness and purity of my life<sup>1</sup>—and yet none of that purity, none of that goodness was documented.<sup>2</sup> From what was considered important enough to document, one gets the impression that Christ and his apostles were the only ones capable of good works.

The issue of good works leads us to another unrecognized ramification of my role. Christ, my son, is known internationally for his compassion, his love, his generosity, his forgiveness—he's famous for his ethics: well who do you think taught him right from wrong? His mother, of course! Who is it who always teaches a child the first and formative values?

It was no easy feat raising the son of God! Think about it: here we have a little boy who has the gift of miracle-working—do you think for one minute

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<sup>1</sup> Later this was not enough: in 1854, Pope Pius IX instituted the concept of the Immaculate Conception which insisted that my purity extend back all the way to a conception unsullied by original sin in order to provide a satisfactorily chaste womb for the birth of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Actually there are several accounts of my life before and after Christ, but they have not been admitted to The Bible because they are not considered 'authentic' enough. The Protoevangelium of James for instance, written around 150-180 A.D., tells that my parents were Anna and Joachim, and that I lived in the temple of the Lord from the age of three.

he always used his powers to serve God? Of course not! For a while he went around creating fantastic toys (as a carpenter's family, we couldn't always afford the best), and there was no end of trouble because all of the other children wanted ones just like them (I had to laugh at some of them, the rascal had imagination!). And I had to explain—somehow. He also played some very nasty tricks on people who angered or upset him (once he changed some children into goats).<sup>3</sup> It took some doing to get him through that phase quickly! So even though he was the son of God, he had to be taught that there is a good way and a bad way to use his powers. And, as his mother, I taught him.

In fact, I suspect at times that the only reason I wasn't chosen to spread Christian morality was because God knew no one would listen to a woman. It's sad, but it's true. So the next best thing he could do was choose me to be his mother. He didn't have to. Did you ever wonder why he even bothered? I mean, the virgin birth proves he—<sup>4</sup>

Let's consider next this issue of virgin birth. I am not going to debate its truth. I have realized for a long time that what is believed to be true matters more than what is true. And the story of the virgin birth is believed to be true.<sup>5</sup> But the belief is at my expense! Because of it, I was suspect of infidelity—a very serious accusation then, I could've lost my life (Matthew 1:19)! Fortunately the suspicion was disconfirmed.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, to believe in the virgin birth denies me the joy of sexual intercourse—I am not even allowed the biological prerequisite to motherhood. (That is, I am not allowed the pleasing one. The painful one, childbirth, I am allowed: contrary to popular belief,<sup>7</sup> Christ was the son of woman, and he was

<sup>3</sup> See the Arabic Gospel, Chapter 40.

<sup>4</sup> God didn't really need a biological mother for Christ. He obviously didn't really need a biological father. In fact, God has Christ born without a human father, because that would've detracted from his divinity. But it seems having a human mother didn't detract as much—hasn't anyone ever considered the implications of that one?

<sup>5</sup> And yet there are innumerable such stories in pagan mythology, but no one dreams of taking them seriously. This one, they took seriously.

<sup>6</sup> But not on my word, no, my word was not good enough: only after an angel appeared and explained to Joseph, did he believe it.

<sup>7</sup> Which is amazing, in view of the many confusions: (1) Was it a virgin birth or not? If it was, if Joseph wasn't the biological father, then doesn't the genealogy tracing Jesus through back through Joseph to David and Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17) break down? (2) Was it a virgin birth or not? The doctrine of virgin in partu claims I did not experience the 'pangs' of childbirth, but Salome, my midwife, will vouch for the pain; and

born of flesh and blood, not of the spirit—I have the scars and stretch marks to show it.)

Further still, the ramifications of this belief go beyond the personal. I have become a universal symbol: the virgin birth implies that intercourse is undesirable, that natural conception is inferior, that the state of virginity is more blessed than the state of non-virginity.<sup>8</sup> I resent symbolizing such a concept: one state is neither more nor less blessed. And I resent being in the awkward position of putting women into an even more awkward, indeed impossible, position: motherhood is pure, but the prerequisite, sexual intercourse, is impure. Well what is one to do then?<sup>9</sup>

Let me go on to yet other unrecognized ramifications to my role as mother of God. For instance, a little publicized fact is that I had some powers of my own. In fact, many people at the time had psychic powers—clairvoyance, psychokinesis, telepathy—it was a time before those skills evolved out of use.<sup>10</sup> I could tell you of several proofs, but I'll choose one which is documented (but again, unacknowledged): near the end of my life, I went with St. John to Ephesus, then 'appeared' in Jerusalem. (However, I fell asleep when I got there; a feat like that at my old age took a lot out of me.) Such an event should not surprise you—I am, after all, venerated as healer, said to have the powers of 'miraculous intervention'; and the power of relics of mine was reaffirmed as legitimate by the Council of Trent (1545-64); and don't forget the Shrine at Lourdes, established in 1858, to commemorate my appearance to Bernadette, and the Shrine at Fatima, 1917, for when I came to those three shepherd children.

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that eyewitness account of her arm withering because she reached out and touched me, not believing the hymen could still be intact but discovering it was, has been relegated to the Protoevangelium (I wonder which part of the story was decided to be invalid. If it was the intactness of the hymen that was in doubt, they had to be considering then either sexual intercourse or natural birth as a possibility.)

<sup>8</sup> This view continues to be manifested by the vow of celibacy taken by nuns and priests; by the popular male habit of according extra status to 'deflowering' a virgin; by popular porn (by men for men) which exhibits women in childish, innocent, virginal costume and character; and by popular 'kiddie' porn (also by men for men) which exhibits children as sexually desirable—all of which implies that the state of virginity is something special, an added bonus.

<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the state of motherhood may be pure, but the physical experience of it, childbirth, is not: consider the 'purification rites' I had to undergo (Luke 2:22) even though I had just given birth to the son of God!

<sup>10</sup> Peter, for instance, made some dogs talk; he also raised the dead, and flew (The Acts of Peter, Chapter 9). John, another example, controlled the bedbugs that were bothering him one night (The Acts of John, Chapter 61).

Another example, the one last point of ‘credit not given when credit is due’ that I want to make, is best illustrated by examining the image, by examining how I am portrayed. Think of the Madonna. Any madonna will do, they’re all the same. Or think of the pietà. Any pietà. Always the young girl with the blank face, like she’s never had a real thought or a strong feeling in her life. Real thoughts and strong feelings! One of my children went through life as the son of God—wouldn’t that make you think? Then he—my son—had nails driven through his body—wouldn’t that make you feel? Can you understand the struggle to understand, or at least accept, such an injustice without anger, without hatred? Your (male) image-makers call me mother of God, but they don’t take into account what that means, they haven’t understood what that really means! I lived, through days, months, years, I became a middle-aged woman, an old woman.<sup>11</sup> In the pietà, my son is thirty-three—that should make me forty-eight, but do I look it? No, I have been denied my life, my experience, my self. And if you do not recognize my reality, you do not recognize me.

Yes, I am the mother of God. But it appears to be in name only. For all intents, purposes, and effects, Christ (like almost every other male in The Bible) may as well have begotten himself.

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<sup>11</sup> Like my existence before Christ’s birth, my existence after his youth also becomes unimportant—it’s as if I was his mother only for the first ten or fifteen years. Even he seems to have thought that: at first he simply wouldn’t acknowledge me as his mother—I was the same to him as anyone else who followed God (Mark 3:31-35); later, he had the hurtful ingratitude to call me ‘woman’ (John 2:4)—not ‘Mom’, not ‘Mother’, not even ‘Mary’.

# I am Mary

of Bethany, thirteenth apostle.

That's right. There were thirteen of us. One of us was a woman. One of us wasn't mentioned. One of us was neatly written right out of the records. No, you cry, that's impossible. Impossible? You've read Orwell, the Ministry of Truth. But, you protest, that's a fiction, about the future. Okay, what about Russia? There maybe yes, you concede, but not here. Pope Joan then? But that's in the past. Touché. The Bible was written in the past. The distant past, when male domination was an integral part of society. And it was translated in the less distant past, when male domination was still accepted. And it was edited—What do you mean, edited? I mean edited, I mean certain parts cut out.<sup>1</sup> Haven't you heard of the Apocrypha? They're the gospels and epistles not admitted to the New Testament, of 'doubtful authenticity', my Oxford reads. Doubtful, hell. Threatening to the status quo is more like it.

Haven't you ever wondered why some of the apostles are mentioned a lot and others named only once, if that? How much do you know about Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, and Thaddeus? Very little. Why? Because for one thing, like me, they were not part of the inner clique. There was something 'wrong', something not 'kosher' about each of us. I was female. The others, well, I'll let them speak for themselves.<sup>2</sup> I am speaking for myself here. Finally.

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<sup>1</sup> Such as these: "In the Gospel that is in general use among them which is called accordingly to Matthew, which however is not whole and complete but forged and mutilated—" (Gospel of Ebionites) and "Now of the things they keep saying about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are altogether falsification, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified" (Secret Gospel of Mark). And this little gem: "The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire" (Gospel of Philip).

<sup>2</sup> Though I'm sure you can guess, the reasons for exclusion haven't changed much: wrong colour perhaps, or wrong sexual preference . . .

Besides not being ‘in’, for most of my apostolic life I couldn’t read or write. Knowledge is power, you’d better believe it. It’s not a sufficient cause, but it is a necessary cause. Stop a minute and think. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. They are the ones you know about. They are the ones who could write. And since they wrote about themselves, or others of the ‘in’ group,<sup>3</sup> even second-hand knowledge of the rest of us is scarce. Further, have you ever noticed how incredibly similar their stories are? That’s because they collaborated, they got together to make sure their accounts matched. They felt that the movement (their following, their power, their conspiracy?) couldn’t afford any discrepancies, any dissenting views. They were determined to reveal a solidly united front. (Though of course they messed up from time to time. Look at the naming of the Apostles: Luke must’ve been so nervous about eliminating my name that he lists ‘Judas, brother of James’ where the others list ‘Lebbaeus Thaddaeus’.<sup>4</sup>)

My ignorance wasn’t voluntary, I can tell you that. I wanted to learn how to write. There was so much about Our Lord that needed to be written down, clearly and completely. But women weren’t allowed in the schools, and no man I pleaded with would condescend to waste his precious time teaching some woman to do something she didn’t need to know and probably couldn’t learn anyway. So I never had the chance to declare for eternity my love and devotion or to record Christ’s thoughts, feelings,<sup>5</sup> and actions so that others could love Him too. Furthermore, because I couldn’t read, I couldn’t check what the others had written. I had to take it on faith that they’d actually written what they said they’d written. And when they refused to read it to me, as they often did, I simply had to trust that they were writing the truth—the whole truth.

But it appears that the whole truth is not there. Is it because they didn’t write it? Or is it because people along the way have taken out or changed parts? Probably both.

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<sup>3</sup> There are two exceptions: Judas is mentioned, but only because of the betrayal, and Thomas, because of that dramatic doubting scene.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, this leads me to think that maybe there were only twelve apostles—including me: perhaps neither Lebbaeus Thaddaeus nor Judas, brother of James, was an apostle, but a substitute to keep the number to twelve when they excluded me. (Now that I think of it, neither of them was around very often.)

<sup>5</sup> I think the Fortunate Four—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—have written very little of His feelings. They seemed to focus instead on His sensational actions, and I don’t think this does justice to what and who He was.

It seems that most of the men just eliminated mention of me altogether. It was easiest that way. I think Luke, as I said, felt a little uneasy about the whole thing though. He had trouble just wiping me out like that, and he tried very hard to justify it. I remember many lengthy talks with him during which he tried to find weaknesses in my faith, errors in my understanding of Christ's teaching. He never did, of course. I don't know what it was with him. It might've been that he was so traditional, so conservative, that he simply could not accept a woman in such a position. It's clear Thomas couldn't. He actually wrote this in his gospel: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"<sup>6</sup> (Fortunately, that passage was one correctly labeled inauthentic by a later editorial decision.)

You are shocked to have found all this out, I can tell. Good. And you ask, outraged, why hasn't this injustice been redressed? Why hasn't The Bible been re-edited, the Apocrypha re-evaluated? No doubt this is being done on an ongoing basis. But we are still in a time when male domination is accepted as the norm, and any reconsideration has left the earlier decisions (to change or omit) unaltered. Haven't you picked up a recently written history text lately? Still, over ninety percent is devoted to what men have done in the past; women certainly existed, and certainly did things, but they are simply not mentioned. Haven't you picked up a science text? They still describe the discovery of radium as by Pierre Curie, with the assistance of his wife. Enough? Let's go on.

It's time for the whole truth now. I was His favourite. No one understood Him like I did, no one followed in His footsteps like I did. I remained faithful to Jesus at the cross. And I remained faithful to Him at the tomb. The other (male) apostles ran away, betrayed Him, denied knowing Him, doubted Him. Not me.

And there is one more part of the whole truth you should know: the Last Supper—I was there. In fact, it was at my house. Oh I know, Mark (14:13-15)

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<sup>6</sup> I'm not kidding—see the Gospel of Thomas.

and Luke (22:10-12) tell it a different way. They say Christ said “Go and you’ll meet a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow him to his house and he’ll show you a room all prepared.” What an unlikely story! Rooms don’t prepare themselves. And men never carry water, it’s the women who go to the well. No, what happened was that Jesus asked me to have it at my house. Much as I resented the possible sexist interpretation, I thought it a great honour to be chosen to prepare my Lord’s last supper. Oh I realize I’m not in Leonardo’s great work of art. That’s not surprising.

But I am in Bouts’ painting. Go look. There I am. Right by His side, where I belong.

# I am Mary

Magdalen. Whore, harlot, adulteress, sinner.

Wrong. I am Mary Magdalen. Devoted disciple of Christ. What we have here is a simple but serious case of mistaken identity.

Let's consider Luke first. The one time (apart from the sepulchre scene) that he mentions me, he says "and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalen, out of whom went seven devils" (Luke 8:1-2). That makes me sound like I was a reformed sinner; in fact, I was a cured cripple.

Another example is the story told by John (8:1-11) about a woman taken in adultery. Everyone thinks it's me and has therefore labelled me adulteress. Apart from the fact that 'taken in adultery' suggests that the man was the adulterer/rapist<sup>1</sup> and the woman 'merely' an innocent victim, the name of the woman is not given and there is absolutely no evidence connecting her with me!

Consider next the famous Webber/Rice production called Jesus Christ Superstar. Probably nothing else has brought me to the attention of the world more than that, and I'd be ever so grateful—if it weren't so completely incorrect. They show me lovingly (with strong sexual suggestions) anointing Christ's forehead with oil to soothe Him. Nothing like that ever happened. There was a woman who anointed His forehead with oil, both Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:3-9) mention the scene—but there is no mention of the woman's name or of her sexual interaction (with Christ or any other man).

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<sup>1</sup> Why wasn't the man brought before Jesus? I don't know, I don't remember this event; maybe he was, and John just chose not to write about it.

And there are two women who anointed Christ's feet with oil: one is mentioned by John (12:1-8) who does name the woman as Mary, but it is Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus' sister), not me, and John says that quite clearly: "It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick" (11:2); the other woman is not named (Luke 7:36-50) and isn't even described as a prostitute but (merely) as a sinner.

This persistence, this obsession to label me a harlot is unsettling, but not surprising: it fits the trend of regarding any intelligent and independent woman as evil.<sup>2</sup> As for intelligence, it was no secret that I could read and write: I taught myself (sneaking around my brothers as they went to school, as they did their homework), and I was just beginning to teach others. And as for independence, well, I was dependent on no one, and no one was dependent on me: I was no one's wife, and no one's mother. And you see, women are identified by their sex. So if sexuality fulfilled through motherhood does not apply, and sexuality fulfilled through marriage does not apply, then typical of the all-or-nothing mentality, I must be a case of sexuality unfulfilled or sexuality run rampant: I was not a virgin, therefore I must have been a harlot.

Well, not for the first time, the Church's simplistic and dichotomous thinking has led to error. Oh yes, all of this misinterpretation has been official: in 600 A.D., Pope Gregory decreed that the three Mary persons—Mary of Bethany, the un-named sinner who anointed Jesus with oil and was forgiven by Him, and myself—be combined under the name of Mary Magdalen, and assigned the character of the penitent prostitute. Pope Gregory made a mistake. But not the one you're thinking of. Surely he knew his Bible a little better than that. He just didn't know women very well.

Nor did he know Jesus Christ. But I do. And I know very much how to love Him. In fact, in the second century, heretical gnostic tradition exalted me as a specially beloved disciple of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Along with Mary of Bethany, James' mother, Joanna, Salome, and a few others, I received the highest revelation:

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<sup>2</sup> I'm surprised, in retrospect, that I wasn't labeled 'witch'—especially after my leg healed.

<sup>3</sup> No wonder it's considered heretical—a woman given greater esteem by Christ than any of the men? ("But Christ loved [Mary Magdalen] more than all the disciples . . . The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'" Gospel of Philip.)

the resurrection. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have admitted that I was there, but they won't recognize the significance: Christ came to us first because He knew we'd believe it was Him; had any of the men been there instead, they wouldn't have believed it (Mark, 16:11-14), they wouldn't have understood. You see, Christ knew He could trust us to tell the others exactly what had happened. And we did. We ran laughing, ecstatic, with joy and love, and told the world who we were and what we had seen. But sadly, typically, our "words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11). So weak is your faith, so strong your misogyny.



# I am Thecla

Reverend Thecla. Of the ministry of Christ.

Reverend, I said. I am not a member of the ladies' auxiliary, I do not bake for the annual bazaar or tend the nursery in the church basement. I am a minister. I am not one of the sisters, visiting the sick or teaching the children. I am a priest. Or a bishop. Or a pope. I am the Reverend Thecla.

Why is it so often assumed that only men are capable of carrying on the spiritual duties of the church, while women are fit merely for the practical, often menial, duties?<sup>1</sup> Why, when history clearly indicates otherwise?

Phoebe was a deacon at Cenchrea, the seaport at Corinth. Priscilla was a professor of theology at Apollos, and she founded the Church of Rome. Paula founded and endowed several monasteries, and it was she who began the practice of copying manuscripts, without which many important books would have been lost; and it was she (not Jerome) who was the author of the Vulgate—she translated the Jewish scriptures from their original Hebrew to Latin.<sup>2</sup> And Eustochium, Paula's daughter, copied the manuscripts for circulation. And Marcella, Melanie, and Susanna—their funding made possible many projects which otherwise could not have been completed. And Tryphena, Tryphosa, Julia, Olympas, Lydia, Lois, Joanna, Eunice, Damaris, Chloe, Candace—the list goes on.

Or went on. Lest that is because you doubt our strength, our faith, look—

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<sup>1</sup> No, it's not quite like that, is it. Visiting the sick and teaching the children has (often great, quite possibly greater) spiritual value. So it's like this (too): why is it so often assumed that the sphere of activity (ability, influence) for men is that of adults, while the sphere for women is that of children and invalids. (Each to their own—kind?)

<sup>2</sup> Jerome simply made too many mistakes, and he knew it; he credits Paula for the work; it was later 'church fathers' who could not accept this and changed 'sister' to 'brother'.

look at the Acts of Paul and Thecla.<sup>3</sup> They tell of my devotion to Christ and of the power of my faith. Twice I was punished because I refused to marry (first Thamyris, then Alexander), choosing instead to be one of Christ's ministers. When I was to burn at the stake (a demand voiced by my own mother), rain and hail extinguished the flames. And when I was to be torn apart by wild beasts, lightning and fire diverted the killer animals; then a fierce lioness emerged from them and protected me by demolishing an attacking bear; and then (I love this part most of all), other women in the spectating crowd threw flowers and the perfumes overpowered the beasts and put them to sleep. And after all of these trials, I continued—to live in the love of Christ, administering the sacraments and preaching to the people of Seleucia. As the Reverend.

The one with a flower in her hair.

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<sup>3</sup> Disapproved by Tertullian and later pronounced apocryphal by Pope Gelasius—simply because the main figure is a female.

# I am Satan

Surprised to find me here? Satan, the Fallen Angel, female?

Well think about it.

Who else but a female would have cause to rise up and rebel against God, the Almighty Father? I mean, haven't you ever found it a little odd, didn't it require just a little bit of a stretch to believe that an angel who had everything—a lovely home, a good job, immortality—would rock the boat and risk that everything just because he wasn't the head honcho? I must admit such an action would be rather typical for human males, but we're talking about angels, and, well, only a really stupid one would do that.

Or one that had nothing to lose. Like me. You don't remember any female angels, do you? Especially no female archangels. Talk about a patriarchy, all of the positions of power and privilege went to the males—Gabriel, Raphael, Michael; the females were so bereft of status, we weren't even worth mentioning. So of course we started a revolution.

And who else but a female would have chosen to approach Eve instead of Adam? I was not about to waste my time on Adam, so obsessed with following orders, so sold on hierarchy as the only system of organization; Eve, I knew, was capable of both intellectual and aesthetic judgement: my arguments were sound and the tree was beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

Another thing to consider is the curious fact that I'm symbolized by the serpent. Now the serpent is considered to be an evil, wily, seductive, manipulative kind of creature—exactly the attributes that have been stereotyped onto

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<sup>1</sup> Adam, by the way, as I expected, passively and without question, accepted the fruit from Eve then. Yet, typically, Eve's action didn't really count: the 'Fall' was not a legitimate event until Adam also ate.

women. This is no coincidence—look at what happens when we mix the new premise (that I am female) into some standard masculist arguments:

- (1) Since Satan is female, and females are evil and wily, and serpents are evil and wily, it makes sense that Satan be represented by a serpent. We thus have a new reason to support an old story.
- (2) Since the serpent is evil and wily, and Satan (a female) chose that form as representation, she (and hence all females) are evil and wily. We thus have new proof for an old assumption.
- (3) Since Satan is a female, and females are evil, and Satan is evil, and Satan chose the serpent as representation, serpents are evil. Another new proof for another old assumption.

Needless to say, though this kind of reasoning appeals to men, the syllogisms are sloppily constructed, the logic is incorrect, and the premises false. For instance, to generalize in (2) from me to all women is to conclude on the basis of an insufficient sample (and it is insulting as well as inaccurate); the second premise of (1), females are evil, is simply not true (and no comment is even necessary); with regard to its third premise, eighty percent of snakes are non-venomous, and other attributes such as their brilliant colouring and adaptability (my reasons for choosing the serpent as my form) are totally ignored.<sup>2</sup> However, I merely wished to point out that my being female doesn't contradict established patterns of thought, and in fact, it adds to them.

For those who still protest, saying Biblical accounts designate Satan as male, well, not only are many Biblical accounts suspect,<sup>3</sup> specifications of sex are especially unreliable. It has merely suited most readers to believe that Satan is male: scanning the angelic ranks, they find it undesirable, indeed threatening, to believe that there were females present there at all, let alone

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<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps significant to note at this time that female(ness) and snakes have been associated throughout mythology: Buto, Python, Tuchulcho, the Furies, the Gorgons, the Chimera, Athene, Demeter, etc., etc.

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit, almost always thought of as male, is considered female by Philip. Arguing against conception by the Holy Spirit, he says "Some said, 'Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit'. They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When was a woman ever conceived by a woman?" (Gospel of Philip); the Hermes Trismegistus tradition, translated from both Poimandres and Asclepius describes God as bisexual; the Secret Book of John and the Gospel of Truth describe the Creator as female.

any capable of starting a revolution, and capable still, even as the vanquished, of having such a continuing influence over the human species.

Further, let me direct your attention to a visual depiction of a Biblical account: The Fall of Man in the *Très Riches Heures* by Jean de Limbourg shows me clearly to be female. True, this painting is now a touch obscure, but then truthful depictions (especially when they are at odds with masculist assumptions) do tend to get relegated to that realm of obscurity.

In conclusion, there is one last thing I want to say with regard to my sex. It's a thought, proposed by the Sethians: they say that the serpent, Ophis, was really Sophia, Mother of the Creator God, in disguise; and she did not 'tempt to evil' but rather gave Adam and Eve the fruit of knowledge, of gnosis, to help them combat the arrogant tyranny of her son, 'God'. Makes perfect sense to me.



II

MYTHS



## Gaia

for centuries  
I scraped the Sistine Chapel  
where God reaches out,  
    touches,  
        transfers,  
and Adam is born.  
flake by flake,  
layer by layer,  
(one has to be careful  
to leave the original intact)  
the work was slow,  
    tedious,  
painful.

    but eventually  
through ages of oil and acrylic  
I uncovered the truth:

a tiny head crowning  
    between warm soft thighs.

## Narcissus

she unwraps the traditional gifts:  
first, the brush-comb-and-mirror set,  
pale pink marbling  
with gilded edges—  
they lie heavy in her hand;  
then the jewelry box,  
gold and cream  
lined with velvet—  
it plays “Fascination”

the new thirteen-year-old  
hands them back to her mother and says  
“Narcissus was a man.”

## Pandora

everyone thinks yours is just another Eve story  
the first woman  
punished for desiring knowledge  
and for disobedience  
but people forget you were created by the gods  
as a gift of revenge for men,  
all beauty and mischief—  
no, not ‘and’  
but ‘therefore’:

it’s boring to be bait:  
after a minimal amount of effort and imagination  
to maximize god-given qualities  
(the male sexual response being far from complex,  
this was far from challenging)  
what is there?  
it’s not easy to be satisfied with attracting men  
as a *raison d’être*—

so that’s why.

## Daphne

—had to keep running—he was right behind me—  
I tore through the forest,  
bounding over rocks and roots,  
his breathing pounded heavy in my ears,  
but I was strong and fast,  
I imagined him—pressing himself onto me—  
forcing himself into me—  
anger surged through my muscles,  
stronger, faster,  
one more uphill, I caught sight of the river,  
felt his step still one stride behind,  
I knew I'd made it—

suddenly her legs felt numb wooden  
her knees locked she staggered on  
her arms stiffened  
confused clumsy  
she stumbled  
tripped

he grabbed at her tunic  
and a leaf came away in his hands.

who? whose ego did this?  
Zeus? was it too much for a half-mortal  
to escape from a god? no, then  
Peneus? it was bad enough not having a son,  
was it too much to bear  
your only daughter choosing celibacy  
denying you a chance for, at least, a grandson?

or Apollo, symbol of youthful manhood,  
was it too much to handle  
my not wanting you?  
or is defeat to a woman  
too much for your image?

he thrust both hands toward her  
and grabbed a handful of leaves  
delighted, he laughed,  
and plucked from her, leaf by leaf  
—while she stood rooted bound unable to move—  
until she was naked.

lazily he wove them into a wreath  
and set it upon his head;  
it caught on and soon  
all the men of achievement  
sporting a laurel wreath:  
her humiliation was their honour  
—it became tradition.

## Daedalus

I thought you would've learned—  
all of you at Los Alamos,  
and the rest of you  
all over the world.

why was my story saved?  
why is it told and retold  
if not for that?

do you see in it  
just a lesson in ingenuity?

were you as blind to the deaths  
of those 14 Athenians  
year after year  
as you were to the 140,000 Japanese  
years  
after year—

of course I tried to destroy it  
but I couldn't get close enough!  
they had taken away my security clearance  
and it was too well-guarded!

then I tried to amend  
(to amend— how could i?)  
I saved Theseus and the others  
one year  
(one year!)

DOES IT MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?

the same government I helped, then—  
I was of no further use, then—  
I was a threat then—

so when they come to you  
with money, for research and a lab  
with anthems  
with arguments, about the lesser of two evils  
with threats  
please—  
say to them  
no  
it cannot be done.

## Ismene

the first REAL woman:

we are women, you said, we must obey,  
our position depends on it, besides  
we have no strength to defy the state  
—and so you didn't

then seeing your sister, Antigone,  
succeed in an act of civil disobedience  
in an act of justice, honour, strength, love—  
you regretted and tried to retract  
to change your position  
to come forward with her  
—but it was too late

and *you* were never mentioned again.

## Poseidon

yes, I lost the election,  
no, I did *not* flood the land  
the sea was a bit turbulent for a while,  
but that's all—I was angry!  
to lose because of incompetence is one thing  
but to lose just because I'm a man—  
well that's so stupid!  
who wouldn't be angry?

## Athena and Orestes

In the Supreme Court today  
a precedent was set  
that will change the world.

The unusual case of Orestes was presented  
and recorded by the court  
as the first in which  
the accused suffered from guilt  
and sought purification.

Judge Athena, presiding,  
responded to the particulars of the case  
by instituting a new law  
of mercy and forgiveness.

As a result  
the Office of the Furies,  
until now merciless avengers  
zealous for justice, fair and square,  
became the Office of the Eumenides,  
benign powers  
capable of compassion.

## Circe

typical:

the woman is blamed  
for the man's behaviour  
as if he has no control  
over himself.

maybe it all stems from his dick:  
one thing beyond his control,  
and unhappily for him  
(and stupidly, I might add)  
the one thing he has vested  
his entire manhood in;

so no wonder he develops this complex:  
he compensates with this ridiculously  
no, dangerously  
distorted need to control  
and becomes, as an entire sex,  
dominating and domineering  
always seeking, taking, seizing control—  
while at the same time  
denying control  
and charging the woman  
(who tempted, who provoked)

with full responsibility  
for what happens

they say you turned them all into swine:  
but we know better—  
when a group of men  
comes upon a woman alone,  
we know what they act like.

## The Muses

We are the nine forgotten muses:  
Selemon, muse of sculpture and ceramic,  
Amacles, muse of songs of love,  
Dextrete, muse of gymnastic and artful athletic,  
Prytes, muse of painting,  
Caleus, muse of numbers and their meaning,  
Florus, muse of botany and all of nature's beauty,  
Arachles, muse of tapestry and weaving,  
Ataeus, muse of physic,  
and Hestor, muse of alchemy  
that most magic art and science.

We too can delight and inspire  
like the Nine who are the gods' gift to men  
we are their gift to women.

## Omphale

you were my slave and my stud  
and when I didn't want you  
I didn't want you around.  
you were stupid, insensitive, boring, immature  
so I kept sending you away—  
you thought it great fun  
to get blood and shit all over your hands  
each joe job an adventure, a challenge,  
and since someone had to do it  
who was I to tell you different—

to tell you that what you did  
was no more Herculean than  
working on an assembly line  
in a slaughter-house plant,  
or trudging with toilet brush and scrub rag  
after carefree vacationers  
in a 26-storey five-star hotel—  
jobs also done by no-names  
who are also being fucked by their employers.

## Hyacinth

it was a legal tackle—  
it's not as if football is a dangerous sport,  
sure you have your injuries,  
but it's not like boxing  
where the guys walk around brain-damaged,  
or look at hockey,  
they have more fights than goals,  
I mean even in skiing  
a non-contact sport  
you fall, you get hurt,  
or your knees don't last past thirty

it was a legal tackle—  
Boomer was running with the ball  
it was twelve-seven  
we really needed this game  
and I knew I could take him  
we played in college together

it was just a quirk  
a freak accident  
that his neck snapped like that—  
it wasn't my fault  
it wasn't because of how or where

I hit him

## Philomel

did ya hear the one about  
Philomel?  
this guy raped her  
then cut out her tongue  
(he was some vip, see)  
and then the gods  
*being so very merciful*  
(are ya ready for this)  
the gods, in their mercy,  
turned *her* into a *bird*.

## Clytie

I can see you sitting there  
looking up to your love  
watching his every move  
through the sky

like the girl who waited  
every day at the corner  
so to follow him to school  
I knew his timetable  
where he sat for lunch  
and which afterschools he had practice

gradually your life changes  
from human to plant  
till you are finally immobilized  
by your adulation  
and unrequited love

if only you'd known  
he wasn't a god at all  
but just some bunch of hot air

## Eurydice

I heard your plea  
to the gods of the underworld—  
‘the bud was plucked  
before the flower bloomed’—  
What is this shit?  
I was a grown woman  
had been ‘in full bloom’ for years!  
Then I noticed a phrase here and there—  
‘all born of a woman’  
‘the rape of Proserpine’  
—so I know why you came back.

what I don’t know is  
why you asked for a year  
when nine months would’ve done.

## The Danaïds

there are so many of them  
in the kitchen doing the dishes  
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet  
in the laundryroom washing his clothes  
in the livingroom dusting the furniture  
in the kitchen preparing his dinner  
in the bathroom scouring the tub  
in the laundryroom ironing his shirts  
in the livingroom vacuuming the rug  
in the kitchen doing the dishes  
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet  
in the laundryroom washing his  
who did not want  
to marry  
to become a wife

## Amphion

perhaps you're right about my beard—  
it's funny, I guess facial hair  
well, hair of almost any kind  
is a measure of masculinity  
and academics and artists  
have always felt a little like eunuchs  
(real men use their bodies)

it's an interesting insight  
(and surprising from you)  
but it falls a little short—  
what I wonder is this:  
do I have a beard  
to look more like a man  
or less like a woman?

## Galatea

you don't know me by name,  
though you've heard of my husband, of course — Pygmalion.  
the myth ends with our marriage.  
then the real story begins.  
(no, the real story begins a year later,  
with our divorce.)

it shouldn't surprise you —  
I mean, look at the courtship:  
it really didn't involve me:  
he spent months romancing his own private image  
of the perfect woman,  
not me.  
(that happens a lot.)

then, as you know, he visited Venus,  
she was impressed with his passion,  
and made his sculpture  
(his archetype of the life-sized inflatable doll)  
come alive:  
he proposed immediately,  
and, I accepted.  
(why, you might wonder.  
well, it's not uncommon for a disproportionate attachment



## Gorgons

it's not *our* glance  
that turns you to stone  
but your own—

as soon as you see us  
    you become cold  
    insensitive  
unable to respond

to ugly women

## Dido

Founder and Ruler of Carthage,  
First at the bar, and Chair of the Law Association  
President of the Business Alliance  
Premier of the Year eight years running  
Seventeen times on the cover of *Newsweek*  
Lifetime member of Rotary and Big Sisters

(too bad what's-his-name came into your life)

## Menelaus

to tell you the truth  
I don't know if she  
went willingly  
or was taken—  
Helen had a mind of her own  
and was rather enraged  
she wasn't allowed to use it  
to choose her own husband

when I got home  
she was gone  
and really it was more for show  
than anything else  
that I—  
I was expected to try to get her back  
I was expected to be angry  
truth is  
I didn't know  
if I was jealous or worried

I never intended it to last  
nine years  
I never intended Troy to fall as it did  
all those people, dead

over one woman  
one beautiful woman—  
(well, really, over one man  
—one very stupid man)

but one thing led to another  
and soon it was too late  
I mean soon there was too much loss  
to say this is stupid, let's forget it—  
which one of us could face  
the surviving family  
and say  
we're quitting, so  
your husband, or your father, or your son  
died for nothing—  
so we had to keep going—  
because it just got harder and harder  
to stop

## Psyche

'love cannot live  
when there is no trust'  
you flung the accusation at me  
and then walked out

yet you had been testing me  
again and again  
every single night—

—it wasn't me who was faithless.

## Hylas

It was a great arrangement—  
to be his armour-bearer  
to have a legitimate reason  
to be close to him  
day and night, always, forever  
close  
to him  
strong, powerful, fearless  
—all the boys envied you  
(well, the few that knew)

But then finally everyone knew.  
When you went under, Hercules went crazy  
and as he exhausted himself diving down,  
then bursting up for air, diving down again,  
and again, and again, and again,  
as he passed up the greatest quest ever  
for the hopeless chance of saving you,  
as he slowly killed himself  
rather than be without you,  
everyone knew.

## Atalanta

wandering through the mines of myth  
I choose Atalanta as my next subject.

shall I write a simple hymn of praise  
for a woman who could outrun, outwrestle,  
and outshoot  
all of her male contemporaries?

or focus on her probable adventures  
as one of the famed Argonauts,  
perhaps her talks with the crones of Lemnos  
while all the younger ones were off  
with the rest of the crew  
repopulating, now that  
the women's revolution was over  
and all of their men dead,  
or her experience as the only woman  
on an all-male quest,  
her part in the debate  
to stop and fight the Amazons  
or go on because the wind was good.

or shall I write about the race—  
she had said she would marry the man  
who could run against her and win,  
so Hippomenes tossed those golden apples,  
and since she paused to gather them,

she lost.

I call my dog to go for a walk  
taking with me, I grin, an apple.

trundling through the autumn bush

I reconsider the race

trying to understand her challenge  
as well as her defeat.

and I begin to feel parallels:

as a child, I assumed I would marry

a man more intelligent and more competent than me,

as an adolescent, I had great difficulty

finding such a man,

and as an adult I realized I didn't want to marry

at all

—but didn't have to trump up some ridiculous pledge

to appease the status quo;

so, her challenge was a red herring

and *not* an I-can-only-love-a-man-who's-superior-to-me at all:

since no one *could* outrun her,

it was really just a way of saying

I don't intend to marry—

but then why did she lose?

were they really just golden apples

or was she choosing thus to have

beauty, or wealth, or knowledge, or power—

I take a bite

and suddenly it comes to me:

given the choice between this absolutely delicious fruit

and beating a man

who thinks that (only) if he conquers me,

will I love him—

(and mine was an ordinary red one.)

## Penelope

she rises from the reunion table  
and slowly leaves the hall  
Odysseus joins in one last toast  
bids his dearest son goodnight  
then follows  
to find her in her chamber  
weaving

But I am back

you need never play that charade again—  
this shroud is not for Laertes  
it is for my husband, Odysseus

But I am alive

I am Odysseus—  
twenty years ago my husband feigned madness  
desperately praying for exemption from the army  
so loath he was to kill.

you have just murdered  
slaughtered  
thirty-eight defenceless men.

But I—

this shroud is for my husband  
the Odysseus I know has died.

## Macha

this one I'll tell straight:

you were forced to race against a team of horses  
you were pregnant at the time  
you won  
then you died, giving birth

but with that last great exhalation  
you cast a curse  
upon the warriors of Ulster:  
for nine generations  
whenever they attempted to fight  
they were incapacitated  
with childbirth pains.

## Jason—I

so here I am  
perfectly happy  
studying, hunting, courting,  
then one day dad tells me  
that he's not my dad at all  
that my real father was the King of Greece

*Pelias?* I ask

no, he's your cousin  
he took the crown by force  
you're the rightful heir  
and now the time has come:  
you must go back and reclaim the kingdom  
restore the family line

*but you're my family*

no, you have a duty  
you must avenge your father's death

*what's done is done*  
*I don't want revenge*  
*—and I don't want the kingdom*

my son, you will make a great king

*maybe I will—but so what—  
I don't want to be*

Jason, it's your responsibility

*what, to fulfill my potential?*

*what about my choice?*

*(I have other potentials I want to pursue)*

## Penthisilea

not identified by relationship to a male  
so not identified at all

## Persephone

I can't bear another spring—  
another temporary suspension  
instead of an end—

Mother don't you see it's possible?  
Don't you know your power?  
You are Demeter, Goddess of the Earth,  
the whole Earth, Mother! You control—  
Did you think it was sympathy for your grief  
that caused Zeus to send for me that first time?  
No! It was the threat of world-wide famine! Blackmail!  
It worked for eight months,  
it can work forever—  
But no, you feel that's going too far,  
asking too much—  
You were confused by the pomegranate,  
you thought it a compromise, in our favour,  
that I was granted even that eight months—  
Why should *we* compromise,  
when it is *us* who have been wronged!  
Do you forget? I was kidnapped!  
Taken against my will!

let me tell you about the pomegranate:  
he likes my lips smeared with red  
    it's a turn on  
        but that's not the seed  
            he forces me to swallow—  
every night  
    every night I am brought before him  
    as he sits on his throne  
        I am forced to my knees  
        my arms are spread and bound tight  
        my face in his lap  
            my mouth—  
What do you expect in a marriage  
that began with rape—  
MOTHER—PLEASE—UNDERSTAND—DO SOMETHING—

every year when I am released  
I pray it will be winter—

## Adonis

I'm a lover  
not a hunter:  
so what the hell am I doing here,  
in the middle of the fucking forest,  
gored and bleeding to death—  
I should've never left her side.

but it serves me right:  
trying to be two things  
the great lover and the great hunter

no,  
it's the same thing really—

I was trying to  
be a man.

## Ares

Hera, Camilla, the Amazons—  
I am delighted  
to see you cross the lines  
that separate sex and create gender,  
to see you burst out  
of the passive and the meek;  
but I am dismayed  
to see the blood on your breast  
after doing so  
    or was it *to* do so—  
    *is* it simple abuse of new power and freedom?  
    an adolescent over-compensation?  
    a belief that the superior *is* superior?  
    —or is it an intermediate that *must* be,  
    like the ugly maggot  
    between newborn and airborne,  
    the swing of a pendulum  
    to the other extreme  
    which is necessary, by all laws of motion,  
    before achieving the centeredness  
    of androgyny, bisexuality.  
so dangling thus between delight and dismay  
I have suspended my pen, and chosen others.

But Ares  
also crossed some lines—  
and this is one story I *must* tell:  
when the spear aimed by Athena pierced him  
that great god of war  
went whining to Zeus,  
and standing before him,  
took his sucker out of his mouth  
long enough to pout  
“she hit me”

## Siren

standing on a streetcorner  
to make bail  
for a friend who's in  
with a john who's not

she screams, piercing the night—  
don't keep faulting us  
for your lack of resistance!

## Acrisius

I realize now  
what nemesis it was:

like most of the men I knew  
I wanted a son  
daughters weren't quite good enough  
it wasn't quite the same  
a man needed a son  
to be his rightful heir  
to carry on the family name

well I got one—  
(in a way—a grandson—)  
then lived the rest of my life  
in fear  
that he would usurp.

## Iphigenia—I

really, your case is no more horrible  
than the millions of us  
who are blown up on the way to market  
or while sitting at the third desk in the fourth row  
who are raped by a soldier  
after his invasion of our town  
or by a can't-be-soldier  
after the double shift in the munitions factory,  
who are handed a letter  
in return for nineteen years of nurturance  
or in place of an anniversary card—

all of us, like you,  
we are sacrifices in the name of war;  
we are the women men kill  
in order to kill each other.

## Thetis

I remember the sixties  
all those long-haired draft dodgers  
all those sons of Thetis  
knowing (however unconsciously)  
that a way to avoid killing  
a way to stop making war  
is to become women  
(however incompletely)

## Chryseis and Briseis

it would seem  
that nothing is more important to a man  
than a woman:  
they go to war  
because of one  
and once there  
they fight and kill  
to get one:  
Agamemnon got Chryseis,  
then sulked when the gods said  
he had to give her back,  
and stole Briseis,  
the one Achilles had gotten,  
to have instead.

so this is my poem  
for you, Chryseis, and you, Briseis  
sitting in their tents  
trying to understand  
how you can be both prisoner and prize,  
how you can be sought like gold  
but treated like shit.

suddenly it comes to you:  
it's not womanhood that's being glorified  
but manhood—  
and proof of the latter is having one of the former

the problem understood  
the solution is clear:  
establish another proof of manhood.  
no, it's really not so much  
a matter of proof  
as a matter of definition—

in either case,  
it's out of your hands,  
as long as they're tied.

## Jason—II

so I'm flipping through the applications  
Hercules, Castor, Pollux, Orpheus,  
Peleus, Hylas, Atalanta.  
—Atalanta

well that must've taken some nerve  
everyone knew, this was understood,  
for men only  
well, we need nerve—

I scan her resume:  
Prizewinner of the Calydonian Boar Hunt,  
awards for shooting,  
and running,  
and wrestling;  
clearly equal to many of the men here  
and they had a headstart  
so that makes her superior—

she's in.

## Chiron

what? you don't know my name?  
how can that have happened?  
yes, of course I was there  
with all the other heroes  
in that glorious Hall of Fame,  
I was at the end  
running the daycare center.

## Artemis

I know what this chase is all about  
because there are two of you  
(though there could be more)  
and that is enough:  
one to do and one to watch—  
that's the real reason for teams  
the motive behind male bonding—  
it doesn't matter if you score  
when you're all alone,  
and it's not really worth it  
if she's the only one who knows,  
it only counts  
if the guys are witness

I know what this chase is all about  
because only uncertainties  
need to be tested  
need to be proved  
and you've always been unsure  
about your masculinity  
and your power

the fact of the matter is  
this chase is all about  
two men pursuing me  
with intent to rape

so when you split  
to increase your chances of success,  
I will lead you to a clearing,  
and standing in the middle, in between,  
I will wait,  
till each of you hurls his spear  
toward me,  
then, a quick duck,  
and your javelins will kill each other

(how else can I make you understand  
that when you so seek to injure me  
you also do injury to yourselves)

## Bellerophon

it's frightening  
I mean, it's just her word against mine—  
and quite apart from the problem of simply lying  
for revenge or reputation,  
there can be real misunderstanding—

I mean it's not like we sit there and I say  
do you want to have sex with me  
and she says yes or no—  
of course not—it's all body language  
and you know how unclear that can be—

and a lot of women *do* mean yes when they say no  
because they can't say yes  
it's like they've been taught, told to say no—  
if a woman *wants* sex,  
let alone *admits* it,  
says it out loud *to a man*,  
well she's a slut, a whore—

so you can't even talk about consenting adults  
as long as one of them  
isn't really allowed to consent—

well *both* of them actually—  
I mean, if she says yes, she's a whore  
but if I say no, I'm gay —

so the way it's set up,  
I'm supposed to say yes  
and she's supposed to say no  
—and that's rape.

and that's frightening.

## Iphigenia—II

it was your job  
to get them ready for the execution

extract a signed confession  
as to their national origin or persuasion  
(in whatever way necessary)  
take them incommunicado  
from the interrogation room  
to the holding cell  
and make sure no food or drink was given  
then when there were enough  
to make it worthwhile  
lead them to the death yard  
and tie them to the posts

but one day  
you questioned your orders

and decided not to

refuel the gas chambers  
push the red button

you broke the chain  
disturbed the diffusion of responsibility  
that makes ugly deeds possible

and discovered your brother  
alive and in your arms

## Prometheus

shivering in our black cave,  
one hand holding the infant  
who can no longer cling,  
the other gripping a spear or a stone  
just in case—

you saw us

then you came, and you gave—  
'from one woman to another'  
you smiled

when I see you now  
crucified to that rock  
I think 'of course':  
who but a woman is cursed with  
"forever shall the intolerable present grind you down"  
who but a woman endures while  
others pick, tear, and suck at her flesh

and I think back  
right from Katya Komisaruk and Margaret Sanger  
all the way back to you—  
who but a woman is the great rebel  
against injustice and the authority of power

still shivering, a bit,  
I call out to you—  
be strengthened with the knowledge  
that your flesh has sustained me.

## Sisyphus

I want to tell you, Sisyphus  
that I know of your deed  
as well as your doom,

that your suspicion was correct  
*Aegina was raped,*

that what you did  
stepping forward as a witness  
was only right—  
but in the given context  
to be a man against men against women  
becomes (a bit) heroic.

and I want to tell you  
that if enough of us  
men and women alike  
join with you,  
our hands will wear away the rock  
and end forever  
this relentless cycle.



III

LETTERS



# The Portrait

My dearest Nannerl,

Of course you have a right to be upset about the portrait. After all, you performed right alongside your brother; in fact, your father had the bills printed to read “Two World Wonders.” *Two*, not one. You were with Wolfgang on the 1762 tour through Passau and Linz to Munich and Vienna; I remember Count Zinzendorf called you (not Wolfgang) “a little master”. And you went again through Germany, in 1763, this time to Augsburg and Ludwigsburg as well as Munich, on to Paris, and then to London where the two of you performed that sonata for the Queen of England. And in 1765 you performed in Holland. No, do not doubt yourself, Nannerl: you were quite correct in calling Carmontelle’s portrait inaccurate because it shows Wolfgang at the keyboard, your father at the violin, and you merely holding the music for them. And he said you insulted him! I do know how you feel about the matter and I am completely on your side. Nevertheless, I must ask you to apologize.

And I know that your father’s recent decision to leave you at home and take only Wolfgang on this next tour doesn’t make it any easier. Though I admit to being glad not to be left at home by myself for once, I know it is terribly unfair. And I am writing this letter not to excuse or justify your father, but to explain. Nannerl, you are not to take his decision personally. It is not, as you first thought, that you are not good enough. Recall the Elector of Munich insisted on hearing you play the clavier, not Wolfgang; and there are many who share his high regard for your abilities. Nannerl, you are an excellent musician, a great performer. Nor is it that you have fallen out of favour with

your father; he loves you as much as he ever did. (Which is, unfortunately, not as much as he loves Wolfgang. He is a man of his times. Didn't you ever wonder why he started Wolfgang on lessons at a younger age than he started you? Surely you noticed he spent more time with Wolfgang? And it wasn't until Wolfgang was ready to appear in public that he let you perform. You were young then, and perhaps did not notice . . . All the better. But I know Wolfgang had a head start right from birth and—but enough, I am getting ahead of myself.) Nor is the reason for your father's decision, as you also suggested, that he considers you too frail to withstand life on the road. Wolfgang too came down with typhus in Holland.

Then *why*, you must be crying out! Let me try to explain. There is a time in every girl's life when, suddenly, people stop treating her as a person—and start treating her, instead, as a mere woman. All of the doors that until that time were open are suddenly shut. All except one. It happens to every one of us, some time between twelve and twenty. It is happening now to you. (And later, when that door has been passed through, it too will close, and there will be nothing left: nothing left open to go back to, and nothing open yet to go forward to. As soon as I gave birth to a boy, your father's attention rapidly shifted: I was of no more importance and Wolfgang was everything—but again I digress.)

This time of life is particularly difficult for someone like you, someone for whom the open doors promised such glory and richness. Why, when still a youth you were performing in all the great centers of Europe, you received excellent reviews and return engagements, you were meeting with all the important musicians of the day, you had a knowledge and experience of the outside world forbidden to others of your sex and age. And you were beautiful too, I know enough of the world to know this is an asset. Oh Nannerl, you had it all! Not even your brother had your beauty! But he had something more important: the right sex.

It's a betrayal, I know it. It dashes to the ground all of the things you thought mattered: ability, dedication, desire. I had a talent for singing. I found it hard too, when I realized that I was not destined to become a famous singer. But, alas, I loved your father and wanted a family, so I accepted that loss for

another gain. But you, Nannerl, I suspect it will be a long time before you marry, if at all, and perhaps you will not have any children. So it must be particularly frustrating and painful to have the only door you ever wanted open, suddenly closed.

I know this is little consolation, and indeed in a less generous heart, it would be salt to the wound, but remember, without you, Wolfgang would not be where he is today. You helped him become what he is. Much as your father likes to take all the credit for Wolfgang, it is simply not true. He had a family to support, a job to do, and while he was away playing in the consort, and directing the choir, it was you Wolfgang learned from. Remember in London, when Wolfgang was introduced to Johann Christoph Bach and the two of them, taking turns, with Wolfgang seated between Bach's legs, the two of them played a sonata together and afterwards improvised. What a delight that was to everyone! Of course I knew it was with you he learned how to do that. I remember you, as a mere girl of ten, taking your little brother, then six, and 'babysitting' him just like that. And there was so much more. All the musical games you made up, and the time you spent helping his little hand form the notes on the staff when he could not yet write the letters of the alphabet. When I saw how much more valuable it was to have you spend time with your music and with your brother, well, I did not force upon you all the domestic duties it is common for daughters to bear. Besides, how many women get to do the washing and cooking to the music of such artistic genius!

And all of that makes this last bit even harder to tell you. You suggested that I ask Carmontelle to re-do the portrait. That is an excellent idea, but it cannot be done. You see, the one you saw was already a second version, done at my insistence. Nannerl, in the first one, you were not there at all. The man had excluded you completely, left you out altogether. (And the portrait you see now is his idea of atonement.)

Love,

Mother



# The Protest

Dear Dr. Agnodice:

We are appalled at the charges which have recently been laid against you by your colleagues. The Athenian Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has absolutely no grounds for their claim that you are ‘corrupting’ your patients.

We recognize the dilemma this unfortunate turn of events puts you in: if you do not reveal your sex, thus proving your incapability of the alleged action, you will very likely be found guilty as charged; however, if you do reveal your sex, you will be charged with a different crime, that of contravening Section 1(c) of the Athenian Code of Laws (which states, as you must surely know, that no woman is allowed to practice medicine), and you will most certainly be found guilty.

To protest this action of the AAOG, we, the undersigned, are embarking on an intensive lobbying effort on your behalf. Several of us are married to men of influence, some of us are married to men of wealth, and the rest of us are simply married—which enables us to withhold a certain service, with the result that *no* obstetrician will have work until our demands are met.

We have considered the possibility that our action will bring on the risk of rape. However, we are fairly certain that this will be rare since (1) in such an event, we would momentarily forego our loyalty to you and seek the services of another gynaecologist, a man who knows the husband in question, in order to force upon the transgressor the humiliation of having it known that he must rape, that his wife is unwilling and does not desire (or at least obey) him; and

(2) rape would make the husband in question as guilty as you supposedly are.

—If indeed it is rape you have been accused of. To be truthful, we cannot quite figure out what ‘corrupting’ means. If it means you are raping us, then why would any of us keep returning to you? And if it does not mean rape—that is, if it means we are consenting—then what is ‘corrupting’ about it? (We are not children.)

We believe therefore that the members of the AAOG who initiated and who support this charge are merely jealous: professionally, because your clientele indicates that you provide better service, and personally, because if there is any sexual interaction occurring, it is not with them.

Our demands are reasonable:

- 1) that the charges against you be dropped;
- 2) that compensation be paid for personal injury and suffering and for damages to your professional reputation;
- 3) that Section 1(c) of the Act be repealed.

And we intend to continue our efforts until our demands are met. Never again will a woman be penalized for practising medicine!

Sincerely,

Alethea, Philotima, Lamo, Senia, Terione, Melia, Phryria, Isthnote, Elyclea, Lyspasia, Mycurnice, Iasthia, Chlete, Diomice, Hyaphale, Thetrisis, Eurgenia, Persilea, Dionene

# The Ride

The Tenth of July, 1042  
from Coventry

Deare Sister—

Though it is not long since our last visit, I find once again great need to speak with you! (Would that you lived nearer to Coventry!) You remember the discussion we had upon my arrival, prompted by my journey through Mercia?

Fast upon my return, I spoke to Leofric about the absolute necessity—moral and economic—of lowering the taxes. I described to him all I had seen, as I described it to you: the bordars and cottars living in poverty on their little piece of land, in their thatched wooden huts without any comforts; their meagre clothing, that we are a country of wool producers and traders, boasting the finest weavers' guild, and yet the people of the land are so poorly clothed; and their food, only vegetables, many can not even have meat for a Sunday feast (feast! they do not know the word), not even a piece of wheatbread.

And Leofric said well why do they not come and ask if they want their taxes lowered? If the tax is too high, they would say something—and they have not. But I said, the bondmen can not leave the farms; and the freemen too can hardly leave their work, and their families alone against the wild beasts of the forest. And even if they could, they have no way of getting here. And they can not send a letter, you know they can not read or write, so how are they to 'come and ask'?

But he was deaf to my pleas. He likes being rich—he likes his meat and wheatbread, and his very fine mead, his furs, and his embroidered robes set with jewels. Leofric, I said, have you no charity? You speak of founding a Benedictine monastery, are you not a Christian? Are you not bound by mercy, compassion, generosity—justice, for God’s sake, Leofric! You are the Lord of Coventry, the Earl of Mercia—you are responsible for these people! They are our kinsmen!

I swear sister, I would leave, but for the children. I can not think of them left to his ways, but if I were to take them with me—you know I would barely survive myself alone—with the children too, what could I do? I can not read or write well, women receive so little schooling, even in the monasteries. I am dependent on him, it is true: I am no different from the peasants I speak for.

Though some are. Do you remember Ethelfled? Seven years she gave Mercia good and conscientious governance, she built cities, she planned battles, and captured from the Danes, Derby, Leicester, and York. But it is true, she was regent and queen, not an earl’s wife. And an earl’s wife is not listened to. At least not in *this* court. I have heard that some consult their wives about public policy, but not Leofric—he simply will not or can not heed to reason.

Nor to emotion. I told him of the woman with seven children, you remember, three still little and another one on the way, and her husband lame from an attack by wolves, and her two brothers killed in the last battle, there have been so many lately—so she must work in the fields herself if her children are to be fed, she is almost dead with exhaustion, her neighbours try to help but they are overburdened themselves. I cried, I pleaded, Gawaina, I begged! But no. Leofric ordered me out of his room. I felt so—so weak!

So then I went to those who had strength. I know his advisors, I know which nobles he listens to. I spoke with them plainly and directly—but they paid no attention. (Except one—and you would be surprised which—he said he would speak to Leofric on condition—I refused of course!) Next I went to their wives. But those with influence did not want to risk losing it for mere peasants, and those without did not want to anger their husbands.

Gawaina, I had to do something! So I dressed like a proper little wench

and snuck into the mead-hall one night. I thought if I could explain when they were drunk, maybe they would— But I am not as young and fair as I once was, and I was quickly discovered. Leofric was enraged! There he was, shining in his power, and glory, with two or three child-playthings (where do these women come from?), and suddenly his fat old wife is hoisted onto the table in front of him. I felt such shame! But I explained my presence, and asked him again to please lower the taxes. Well, all those merry red-faced drunkards thought it quite delightful—coarse rude brutes! When the laughter died, Leofric said with great solemnity, “I will.” Oh, Gawaina! I was so gladdened! But then he added “*If* you ride naked through the marketplace at noon.” Well again the hall broke into laughter and there was much toasting to that. To save what dignity I had left, I looked at my husband straight when the laughter stopped and said “I will.” In silence then, I clambered off the table (not a one would help—and they think themselves such gentlemen!) and I walked out.

When I got to my chamber, I full realized what I had said! Ride through the town naked! How could I? I am a God-fearing Christian, I can not show myself in public! Only a pagan whore could do that! But if the taxes would be lowered—I prayed to God—maybe I could . . .

But no, I could not. I know why he made that—that challenge: he does not like his fat old wife. Gawaina, I can not go naked through the town. He is right. With all the children I have had, since marriage at fifteen—though ‘tis to provide him with heirs!—I am indeed a frightful sight. It is good, these fashions, no one need know how ugly I have become. But he knows. And he wants to make a fool of me. And if I ride, he will. (Especially if he does not live to his word. It could be he was too drunk to even know what he said. And I will be twice the fool to take him seriously.)

As I was in my chamber, mother heard me weeping and praying, and she asked what was troubling me. Well, I told her, and she said the most wondrous thing. She said ‘Godgiftu, your body *is* beautiful if you can use it in that way, to ease the burden of all of Mercia. To give the people a good life—to use your body for such a noble purpose is to *make* that body beautiful, my child.’ She then said, with a smile, that Leofric would never have the strength.

The men, she said, they speak of courage and glory, but there is not a one among them who would not feel naked without his *amour*, can you think of him in public without his *clothes*? And God will *bless* your body, Godgiftu, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And I saw she is right. She is very wise, our mother. (She offered to ride along with me, naked too!) I know he is trying to trick me, to force me to use my body as women have always had to, never to use their minds. But it is good to use my body in this way. In this way I use my body to serve my mind.

When I first decided to ride, I hoped no one would look. But now I have changed my mind. Sister, I hope everyone looks and sees this beautiful noble body! I may even put up my hair! A body is not ugly that has borne children, a body is not ugly that displays for justice—no matter how it looks!

So, deare sister, ask God's forgiveness for me, wish me luck, and pray the brute lives to his word. Tomorrow, I ride!

Godiva

# The Experiment

January 12, 1796  
Bristol, England

Dear Mrs. Phipps:

You don't know me and I don't know you 'cept it's the talk that Mr. Jenner is going to use your boy James for an 'experiment'. Mrs. Phipps, you mustn't let 'im!

I saw Mr. Jenner, back in '66 I think 'twas, when he was still an apprentice at the surgery in Sodbury. I can't remember what was ailing me but I do remember a chat we had about the pox. I'd told 'im that I couldn't catch the smallpox because I'd had the cowpox. My mother'd packed me off one day to a cowparty—whenever a cow on one of the farms had the pox, all the chil'ren in the village went to milk it. We'd stay past tea, play a bit o' tag or King's Statue—we'd have our cowparty. Then soon enough all of us would get the cowpox—which is nothing, a few warts is all—and because of that we'd never get the smallpox. Which as you know can be fatal.

Now I recall Mr. Jenner was quite int'rested in my belief. I told 'im 'twas not jus' my belief—everyone knew't, 'twas common knowledge, I told 'im. He insisted that it was perhaps, at best, a common belief. That irked me, it did. So I asked 'im, what's the diff'rence 'tween belief and knowledge? He ever so kindly explained that when you *knew* something, it was true, but if you just *believed* it, well it could be nonsense. So I told 'im again that all the chil'ren who went to cowparties and got the cowpox did not get the smallpox—so 'twas true, wasn't it! He muttered something about old wives' tales, and I assured 'im the men knew't as well as the women. He stood up in frustration then and

said, not without a touch of anger, 'But has it been *proved*? You haven't got *proof*!' 'What proof?' I asked. He stomped around the room then said, 'Proof, my dear, comes from intelligent observation and logical deduction. That's *science*!' Well it seemed to me my belief had as much as proof as any, and was therefore knowledge, even science. But as Mr. Jenner seemed to getting a little hysterical, I wasn't about to stay and tell 'im so.

Now I hear he's going to do an 'experiment', to *prove* that getting the cowpox stops you from getting the smallpox. Well at first I laughed! If he only wants to find out *that* it's true and not *why* it's true, well he's not doing anything of int'rest, is he? And an 'experiment'? Why what's an experiment but observation? The only difference I can see 'tween what he's going to do and what we've been doing is he's going to observe something *he rigs up*, not something that's already happ'ning in the normal course of things. And perhaps what with his lists of figures and notes—what does he call it, his 'data'—maybe he thinks *his* observations will be better. But of course that's nonsense, isn't it? Writing down what I see doesn't make what I see any different, better or worse. I could still see it wrong, or miss something altogether, couldn't I? I could even write it down wrong!

Today I heard one of the lads say that if his experiment works, he'll surely be famous for discovering the smallpox vaccination. I asked what a vaccination was, and then he told me exactly what the experiment was into. Well I laughed, the man's absurd isn't he to say he's going to *discover* a vaccination, since we've been 'vaccinating' against the smallpox for years. After I thought a bit, I got angry. I should like to know if Mr. Jenner is going to give his vaccinations away. Not bloody likely! I'll bet he's going to try to *sell* them, and make a pretty penny out of it! Doesn't seem proper, does it?

But then the horror hit me! If Mr. Jenner knows for certain that a cowpox vaccination will stop the smallpox, then why is he doing the experiment? And if he doesn't know for certain, then he's risking your boy's life! Mrs. Phipps, you must stop 'im! Ask 'im why he's not doing the experiment on 'imself! Go on, ask 'im!

Sincerely,

Ellen (the milkmaid)

# The Patent

C. Greene  
Savannah, Georgia  
July 20th, 1792

My dearest Catherine—

How I would love to send you a magnolia tree! The fragrance of a magnolia is so sweet, Catherine, you can forget just about anything. Some like a camellia, and some prefer sweetgum, but I tell my folks, bury me under a big magnolia and I'll rest just fine.

Not that I'm thinking about dying—but when you're past sixty, you know as well as I do, some things have a way of reminding you that you won't live forever.

But enough of that, let me tell you right away about my new invention! I'm calling it a cotton gin, though it might work for other fibers as well. (Do you grow cotton in Russia?) It's a machine to separate the fibers from the seeds, and this is how it works: you put rows of teeth onto a roller, and line it up with a comb; as you turn the roller (there's a handle on the end), the teeth fit through the ribs of the comb; so when you feed cotton through the machine, the teeth catch the fibers and pass them through, but the comb catches the seeds and they're left behind! It's simple really. The idea came to me while I was combing Charlotte's hair after her little dance, when it was sprinkled through with sequins. (She's started sassing her old grandmother these days, but I reckon she's just growing some southern spirit. The rest of them are

doing fine—what news of yours?)

A young man who has been boarding here at the plantation for a while has just made a model of my machine for me, and it really works! (I have enclosed my design sheets so you can manufacture it too, though perhaps you will need to change the measurements for whatever fiber you'll be putting through it.) I'm absolutely delighted because the women have had to work so hard at separation—it's such a slow and tedious job. But now, we can make a machine for each of them, the work will go much quicker, and they'll have more time to tend their houses, play with their children, sing, dance, whatever—

Mr. Whitney (the young man) is excited about the idea too. Actually he seems a bit overly excited. He's talking about revolutionizing American industry—he sees cotton fields stretching from one end of the country to the other! I told him I didn't think the country needed that much cotton. He said we could export it. I said other countries, as far as I know, generally have no problem providing themselves with fabric for clothing. But he thinks the whole world should wear cotton now! It was awful to hear him talk on and on: he had plans for a giant cotton gin, one to fill a whole room, then hundreds of them in a huge single building. I told him I didn't think the women would like to work in a building with a hundred giant cotton gins whirring and clanking. He laughed and said "Oh no ma'am, not the women, we'll need *men* to operate these machines." I asked "Then what will the women do for work?" He didn't seem to think they needed to work. Rather than pursue that ridiculous line of thought, I simply told him I didn't think the men would want to work in that kind of environment either. "Oh they will," he said smugly. When I raised my eyebrows, he explained—"If they haven't got anything else to do". Catherine, to hear him talk—heavens alive!

I must warn you by the way, that the gin tends to damage the fiber a bit, especially the long breeds. I haven't yet figured out how to avoid that, and until I do (you're welcome to give it some thought!), I won't use it on the finer blends. But since some of the women will prefer to work by hand anyway (especially the older ones and those not blessed with any great co-ordination), I will simply put the finer blends in their charge.

Phineas (you remember Phineas Miller, my manager) has spoken to me about getting a patent for the gin. Do you have patents in Russia? Apparently they're a bit new here, the U.S. Patent Act was made law only two years ago. As I understand it, a patent gives the inventor (they're only for inventions, of "new and useful" things) the exclusive right to make, use, and sell a specific device, for a specific time period. Why, it seems to me it defeats the whole purpose of my cotton gin if I'm the only one who'll be allowed to use it! And it seems incredibly selfish, doesn't it? I told Phineas what I thought and he merely laughed, and said I didn't understand. "Well I beg your pardon," I said, "then explain it to me." So he pulled out a copy of the Act: "Patents," he read, "are to promote the progress of science and useful arts by securing for a limited time to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their respective writings and discoveries." That's nonsense, I said. You don't promote the progress of science by *coveting* your ideas and inventions, but by *sharing* them—as you and I do. When I suggested that this was indeed what we filled our letters with, he turned white as a bleached potato sack. "Oh my" was all he said. Then he left the room. You can understand that I was quite confused.

I still don't like the idea. I don't believe for a minute that no one else has thought of a gin, for cotton or any other fiber. Why, many ideas and inventions have been 'discovered' simultaneously or consecutively by people ignorant of others' work. So why should *one* person get an exclusive privilege to it? Furthermore, I don't believe for a minute that all the credit should be mine: I am indebted to my past, to whatever education I received, for the prerequisite knowledge I must've needed; and I owe my present circumstances for, what shall I call it, for the right timing, for the opportunity? No one exists alone, in a vacuum, so no one can own an idea.

And I'm suspect of the reasons one would *want* to claim ownership. It seems to me it's all ego and personal profit. I can perhaps forgive such immature and irresponsible motives for something frivolous, but for something as useful as the cotton gin, for something that would eliminate so much tedious work and free so many people for other more pleasurable pursuits, why the thought just sickens my heart.

And yet, when I recalled Mr. Whitney's nightmarish vision and Phineas' anger at my response to patenting, it occurred to me that perhaps I *should* apply for a patent—if only to protect my gin from such gross misuse. So I decided to inquire into the matter after all, and I was told that women aren't allowed to apply for patents! Can you believe it? I don't rightly know what I'll do yet, but I will certainly keep you in touch. (Are women in Russia allowed to apply for patents?) (And are you thinking what I'm thinking?)

Before I close, Catherine, I do want to thank you for the idea of crop rotation. It makes *perfect* sense. What we need now is more exact knowledge about which crops use which nutrients from the earth; if we can figure that out, perhaps no one need go hungry again. Do let me know how it works out for your farmers. I am going to see if the idea can be applied with benefit to the kind of soil we have here.

Catherine

# The Model

Helen,

Don't do it. I beg you. Marry him if you like, but when he asks you to pose for his paintings (as he surely will—he is fifty-three and you are sixteen, do you think he's marrying you for your mind?), when he asks you to sit, to lie still—say No.

He will make of you a prostitute. You see, Peter Paul Rubens is a very good pimp: he knows well how to make money from other people's bodies. Oh, he will say he will make something of you—but instead, he will make something *off* of you. He will merely copy you.

And you will get no credit. Though *you* will fill the canvas, though you will be the reason people will want to buy his work, you will remain anonymous: *his* name will be written on the canvas. And on the cheque.

He will glorify you: he will make your skin glow, it will be translucent, like the thinnest petal of a lily lit by the sun; your cheeks will be rosy, your lips, ripe; your flesh will hang like succulent fruit, plump and heavy with promise; he will paint you as saint, angel, goddess—myth! He will falsify you!

Helen, you must not allow yourself to be idealized! Don't you see? You will make peasant women ashamed of their tan, it will seem dirty and disgusting, and then they will throw away their money on creams to whiten their skin. Women will begin to stuff themselves to look beautiful, to look like you. They will go on eating binges till they throw up, and then they will eat again, taking pills to keep it down. Unless their bodies have the metabolism yours has, they will be trying to do the impossible! And not all women have frames

to support your weight. You have no idea of the extremes they will go to: I have seen some women strap themselves into braces to support their newly acquired excess!

And they believe they are beautiful!

No, they don't believe it. They will never look like me in the paintings (not even I look like me)—so they will never believe they are beautiful.

Yes, you know who I am now. I am your sister, I am the one in *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*. So please, attend to this letter, I know what I am talking about. See the consequences *before* you take the action! If you allow yourself to be idealized, you will become an ideal—you will become a *model*. Men will want that body, they will expect that body. And women will kill themselves trying to get it.

Suzanne

# The Stone

February, 1510

Benetta—

So you really did it! I saw your marble come from the quarry today. It is a very big piece! Where will you put it? It won't fit in your apron pocket like your peach stones— But I guess you're no longer going to hide your work. I envy you that. People will know now, they will be saying 'Benetta, the sculptor'!

And 'Properzia, the notary's daughter'. If I am lucky, 'Properzia, Raphael's friend'. No—if I am lucky, 'Properzia, Benetta's friend'!

No, if *you're* lucky. Benetta, do you really think that by doing something big you will become famous? You know quantity has nothing to do with quality! The size is irrelevant. Not to mention impractical. You won't be able to hide it—and I don't mean from your husband now—well, you hear the talk of invasion as much as I do. And you won't be able to carry your work with you wherever you go—around the house, around town, around the country. What if your husband gets posted somewhere else, again? You will even have to build a separate room to work in (I do wonder where the money is coming from), and then you will be able to work only there—what of the summer days we spent in the meadows with our tiny stones?

Benetta, it seems like such a risk. To do something so big. I mean, well it had better be good, because it may be the last piece you do—it will take you so long! Yesterday you had ideas for ten different pieces. You won't have time

for them all now—are you sure you really want to spend five years on one piece? (And that is with assistants—who will want to be paid. Tell me, do you honestly look forward to collaboration or do you now, like Michelangelo, just want to give orders to other people?)

But all right, you have made your choice. Big it is. But why marble? Why not wood? (I'll use the peach *pits* and you can use the peach *trees*!) There's lots of it and it's far cheaper. Is that it? Do you believe that the rarer it is, the more valuable it is? But that's silly! I need only go to the orchard and the ceramic artists simply go down to the river—but so what! How will having to order your material from far away make your piece any better? And why should something expensive be more valuable? Air is free, but I consider it valuable indeed. Just because you have to pay dearly for your marble— And again, consider the risk—I mean, suppose it isn't great—all that money—

And listen, there's more to it than all of that: don't you see, by using marble, by using *material* that's rare and expensive, you're helping to make *art* rare and expensive—its production *and* its acquisition.

And in our society, who is it who has the money? Not us! Our husbands, our fathers, our *men*! So it's not only elitist, it's also sexist! Benetta, as it is, only men are 'allowed' the *desire* to be an artist (of all Marcantonio's students, we two are the only women—and if it weren't for the fact that we also had to audition, we'd never be able to withstand the comments, you know that). Don't give them a monopoly to the *means* as well!

Either way, size, or rarity, or expense, it's *form* you're focussing on. Presence, not substance—not *essence*! Tell me, which is of greater value: an inconsequential, meaningless figure done of an eighteen cube feet of solid gold, or a piece so strong in emotion you weep or so disturbing to the mind it shakes some fundamental belief—made out of a handful of clay?

Benetta, you're breaking with tradition—women have a long line of work in miniatures: Anastasie with her paintings, continuing what Laya did as far back as 100 B.C., and the jewelry artisans, the petite-pointistes— And yes, sometimes it's good to break out of the mold, but you're merely taking up a *fad*! This obsession with bigness, it's only the result of the current fusion of sculpture with architecture—and certain male egos. Are you trying to outdo

Michelangelo's *David*? Is *your* marble *nineteen* feet high? I'm not saying I don't admire his work. It is good. Just not necessarily better.

Yet if we *must* compare, I do think 'ladies' art' wins out. It requires a far greater sensitivity of touch, such fine motor control, exacting precision skills— Could your Michelangelo do a crucifix on an apricot stone? On a cherry stone? Could he have done the set I just finished—eleven stones with Apostles on one side, saints on the other? We don't need science to tell us that women's fingertips are more sensitive: we *know* men's touch is coarse, and clumsy—fit only to handle rock.

with great affection,

Properzia



# The Ring

Vienna, Austria  
December 1, 1925

Dear Lou Salomé—

I have put off writing this letter for so long, perhaps I'd better deal with the procrastination before I deal with what has finally nudged me to put pen to paper—which is, of course, this business about the ring. Why have I not wanted to write to you before this? The reasons are as unclear to me as those which answer the converse question, why have I wanted to write to you now?

I suppose jealousy needs to be mentioned. Sigmund would like that, believing as he does that it is one of the dominant motivating emotions of the female psyche. But contrary to his theories, it is not a case of female jealous of male, but female jealous of another female. (Yet, since what I am jealous of is a male's attention, I suppose it's really the same thing.) I can't understand it: I mean, my husband has been close to women (closer to other women than to me, I mean) in some ways (in ways that matter to me) many times before. I know that my own sister, Minna, and he are very close. So for someone else to figure brightly in his life, even at this late stage, is nothing new to me. Then why is it so upsetting? I guess because part of me was, all that time, through all the others, seeking comfort in the belief that though he may be close to one or another at various times throughout his life, in the beginning and in the end, it is I who occupy the prime spot. But here we are, in our 60s, and though he and you met more than ten years ago, you are still important in his life. And

he is spending his last years close not to me, but to another: it is to you he writes his letters, to you he opens his heart and mind; it is your occasional visits, your presence, he looks forward to, not mine.

Oh you will say, but Martha, everyone knows he loves you in a way he loves no other. This is true, I don't deny that. But it is not a way that matters to me. To be cherished for one's nurturance, gentleness, sweetness, efficiency—to be loved for the mother and housewife I am—that is not important to me, that is not enough for me. That is not me.

Oh yes, I know, that is what I have become. Why? Well, certainly these were the expectations of Sigmund—of the man I loved, of the single most significant person in my life. And everyone else I knew, my mother, my brother, seemed to agree. (How did you escape this, this is one thing I want to ask—) So I accepted the role, thinking the one, motherhood, only temporary, and the other, housewifery, only part-time. How wrong I was. And how difficult it has been to live in that wrong.

(No, that is only partly true. I did not exactly 'accept' the role—I had little choice: I was pregnant three months after our marriage, so short of killing the child or giving it away, I had to become a mother; and since Sigmund had outside work and I didn't, it made sense that I take on the household management.)

But you see, I wasn't always like this. Before our marriage, Sigmund and I used to talk a great deal—like he does now with Minna, and Anna (you know our daughter, of course), and you. And letters? Oh we wrote, at length, discussing, analyzing—like he still does, I assume, now with you. I remember Sigmund once confessed—yes for him it would be like that, a confession—that because I wrote “so intelligently and to the point” he was just a little afraid of me—he couldn't bear to have “his sweetheart” smarter than him. Our interchange was warm, intense, sensitive, challenging. But near the end of our courtship, I felt all of that change. I felt more like a passive receptacle for his—his chronicles of existence: he'd write on and on about what he did and what he thought, responding less and less to what I did and thought. With our marriage, the letters of course stopped. But so did that kind of interchange. You see, after a while *all* he wanted to talk about was himself. (I often

wonder if his earlier interest in me was insincere, a mere strategy to acquire a mother for his children and a keeper for his house—a strategy abandoned as soon as the end was achieved.) He expected our intelligent conversation to center always around his interests, not mine, his work, not mine. What work, you ask. Well, motherhood and housewifery, since those were my only remaining spheres of activity. Don't be silly, I hear you say, surely you can't think that *that* is as important as Sigmund's work. Well yes, yes I do.

You see, the other reason we stopped talking is because I simply wasn't interested in his work. People thought I couldn't understand it. But oh, I could. I didn't have the chance to attend university, but I was well-educated as a young woman, the Bernays were a distinguished family; I studied literature and music, why Bertha (Pappenheim) was a good friend of mine (she was the one who translated Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* into German), and we would often converse for hours. I did understand Sigmund's work. That's why it didn't interest me. And in fact, I suppose that's another reason for my writing to you: curiosity. I can't understand how an intelligent woman like you, an older woman, a woman who has experienced much—and this, this is another reason—I am jealous not only of a male's attention, I'm jealous of *you* too, of what you have been, what you have done in your life: at seventeen, you were reading Kant, Schiller, Pascal, Descartes, Kierkegaard; you studied at the University of Zurich, theology, philosophy, the history of art; you knew Rée, personally, and Nietzsche, and Rilke; you're the author of novels, stories, essays (I especially enjoyed the analysis of Ibsen); men knew you as an intellectual; you walked the streets at night unchaperoned. So I can't understand—how can you be sincerely interested in Sigmund's ridiculous theories? Yes, ridiculous! I do think conversation about motherhood and housewifery would have proven far more fruitful in explaining, analyzing, women's feelings, thoughts, fears, motivations.

But of course Sigmund would discredit such talk. I'm not sure if it's because he discredits all women's testimonies or just mine. (You may rightly remind me that the very process of psychoanalysis starts with listening to what the patient says: starts, yes, but ends, no—Sigmund interprets what he chooses to hear, I know that too well.) You'd think he didn't have a wife, what with his

ridiculous theories about female sexuality. How different all his ideas about vaginal orgasm, and clitoral orgasm, and masochistic tendencies, and so on, would've been if he'd just once asked me, 'Martha, what do you like, does this give you pleasure, how does this feel, what do you want'—but no, of course not. That would be out of the question.

Not only because it would be asking for *my* truth, a woman's truth, but because, you see, sex for him meant reproduction; sex for pleasure was considered perverse. So there was no need to inquire about my pleasure or my opinion because given his belief, his opinion was fixed: he had to say that vaginal orgasm was mature and clitoral orgasm immature, since the former involved reproduction, the latter, mere pleasure; he also had to say, therefore, that penile penetration and ejaculation were the main events of sex: a very neat theory since in the male, then, reproductive activity *entails* pleasurable activity; women fare less fortunately, of course, having to choose *between* sexual pleasure and maturity. To go further, Sigmund believed sexual intercourse to be essential to his health: not to ejaculate (in my vagina—masturbation, as it is non-reproductive, would indicate fixation at the infantile level) would result in a build-up of 'sexual toxins'. In fact, he believed something similar about women, and every time he thought I was 'anxiety-ridden' (which was often since I had six children within eight years), he'd administer the 'solution' to my problems—sex. (That is, he'd rape me).<sup>1 2</sup>

At first I believed his analysis. No one else had ever spoken to me about sex with such authority. If someone else—my mother, a friend, another 'expert', *anyone* else—had spoken of the same topic, I'd have had alternatives; but as it was, there was only his view (the words of someone vested with credibility by many others) against my own experience (unvalidated by corroboration with others). Well, it was easy to dismiss my individual and conflicting evidence as abnormal. Years later I realized how childish it was of me to accept his ideas. (I also realized how many of his views were mere wish-fulfillment!) But then,

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<sup>1</sup> Even though after the first few, we couldn't afford more children.

<sup>2</sup> In view of this practice, it is understandable how he came to believe that coitus for the female was (a) passive—for which of us would actively assist in a rape? and (b) painful—no need to comment here. But it is puzzling how he came to believe women desire that pain—unless it's pure rationalization, to justify his actions, to absolve his guilt.

he had made me feel like such a child, such a subordinate. It wasn't until I had Mathilde, my first, that I felt mature again, equal again, having then a subordinate of my own.

Which leads me to another reason for writing. What on earth did you use for contraception? I know the answer is, in practice, irrelevant now, but of course I assume you were sexual, and, rumour has it, with a great number of men—your serial polyandric lifestyle has not escaped my interest. But as far as I know, you have no children. And that stirs again my jealousy. You see, another reason Minna, and you, and the others have been more attracting, more interesting to my husband, is because you haven't had children to be responsible for. When I was still young, in the early part of our marriage, I had an infant of eight months, a two year old, a three year old, a five year old, and one seven or eight months on the way. How in God's name was I to have the energy and desire left over to discuss his theories?

Theories which were not worth discussing anyway. For instance, the whole idea of penis envy is preposterous. It's a kind of sour grapes projection. That's really all it is. Our wedding night was disappointing to Sigmund. He had been looking forward to the much promised 'endless night of marital bliss'. When he realized that that was for the woman, that I could carry on much longer than he could, that women had a much greater capacity for sexual pleasure than men, well he was almost enraged.<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the fact that his penis was not under voluntary control bothered him; to have such an obvious display of powerlessness in the presence of another—what a blow to his male pride! And it was so vulnerable, so exposed—surely an oversight of biological evolution, since if it was so important, as he saw it, to individual psychological survival and collective physical survival, you'd think it would be more protected.

No, Sigmund envied the clitoris: it was much more capable, as it could

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<sup>3</sup> This might be the catalyst too for his moralistic theory about sex properly being for reproduction: he knew that that would effectively (and spitefully) classify my pleasure, deriving obviously *not* from penile penetration/ejaculation, as perverse.

<sup>4</sup> Given this, it's odd then that he believes women have a weaker sex drive—probably he repressed the knowledge of that night, preferring to measure by subsequent sex (during which I *did* demonstrate a relative disinterest since it involved only penetration) (I never again touched myself in his presence); too, I was pregnant most of the time and that does odd things to my desire.

give long periods of sexual pleasure; it was more efficient in that such intense sensation was concentrated in such a small area; and it was evidence of greater development in that it was the only thing specialized solely for sexual response in the human species. And the other sexual parts were hidden away, safe, protected.<sup>5</sup> To cope with his problem then, he projected his envy of the other's sexual equipment onto the other. And so we have the theory of 'penis envy'.

Consider also his theory of the incest taboo and the accompanying desire to violate it. It's just another instance of him spending his life constructing elaborate theories to account for his own individual feelings and actions. This one supposedly explains why he slept with Minna: it was his way of violating the incest taboo, because he saw Minna as a fantasy mother. Nonsense. I have a much better explanation: she wasn't in the advanced stages of pregnancy like I was, so she was more sexually attractive. Simple and sensible. (I might point out, too, that not only does his time with Minna violate the incest taboo, it also violates his own theory of sex for reproduction: afterwards, he arranged for her to have an abortion, so he must've done it for the pleasure only—by his own standards, an act of perversity, as well as immaturity.)

The interesting thing is that his theories about women turned me, through his expectations and demands, into a housewife (concerned mainly with household maintenance and management), and his theories about sex turned me into a mother (pregnant, tired, occupied with the responsibility of six little human beings). But when, then, therefore, I was no longer a suitable comrade, colleague, or lover, he rejected me—not his theories.

No doubt you are wondering, at this point, why I married Sigmund. More, why did I stay married to him? Well, first, let me tell you, our marriage was not without conflict. In fact, Sigmund associates with women like Minna, and you, not, or not only, because you offer intellectual discussion which I do not, but because in your discussion you offer total agreement and admiration. Which I do not. Of course people think otherwise: Sigmund would not have

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<sup>5</sup> I sometimes think that this partly fuelled his obsession with penetration: he wants to get at the womb. Not only does he envy us because we have one and can therefore carry and give birth to another human being (the reproductive task, that task of supreme importance to the species—and to him—has been entrusted to us), he also envies its invulnerability—if he could only get at it, pierce it, pummel it, he could render it vulnerable (as vulnerable as his penis perhaps).

it known that his wife argues with him. Better they believe me to be a contented little hausfrau. But even our engagement was stormy, and I thought many times of calling it off.<sup>6</sup> We quarreled over religion (I remember I cried the first Friday night after our wedding when he refused to let me light the candles), over money (for a while, due to an inheritance and an uncle's gift, I was the financial supporter),<sup>7</sup> over the apartment (he signed the lease without even consulting me), over the children's names (he chose them all, from men he admired), and on and on. His mother adored him and catered to his every wish (she got rid of the piano when his sister's practising disturbed his precious study), and he expected me to do the same. He wanted to own me. I insisted on autonomy.

So why did I say yes to a man who told me even before our marriage that he adhered to the old ways, that he thought a wife must be obedient and attentive, that he thought women were incapable of ethical thought and behaviour, that he thought Mill couldn't be taken seriously? How can I respond? I can only answer that I was young when I accepted his proposal, and then it became too late to retract, too costly to rebel: I had six children. But, I can also ask, how is it a woman like you, now in the full maturity of intelligence and experience, how can you be so interested in such a man?

Don't you see that the same criticisms you made years ago of Nietzsche apply now, still, to Sigmund? Nietzsche believed that women are by design closer to nature, that "Everything in a woman hath one answer—its name is childbearing." To this claim that women are no more than their sex, you said "No, you are merely incapable of seeing anything more." Yet you accept Sigmund's analyses which are based on the same premise: he claims women's nature is largely determined by their sexual function.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche declared that women are "weak" and "chronically sick"—don't you see Sigmund believes the same? (For we all suffer from penis envy or a castration complex or an Oedipal complex or hysteria or neuroses . . .) Nietzsche said that "When a

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<sup>6</sup> Still now I wonder—if I had chosen Fritz (Wahle, the painter) or Max (Meyer, the composer)—

<sup>7</sup> This upset him, he likes to control the money, and so he has not yet told me that he has been sending money to you for years—but it's not something I mind much—I mean, if you need it—

<sup>8</sup> Though he does "not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well!"

woman has scholarly inclinations, there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature”—a clear case of Sigmund’s masculinity complex, such women are “regressive”, cases of “arrested development”. Nietzsche declared women to be “recreation for the warrior”; Sigmund wants a wife who provides a soothing, safe retreat from the world, he wants a “ministering angel” to tend to his needs and comforts. Need I go on?

No, I need not go on. I have written my letter now, and can add it to those my husband and daughter have been writing to you for years: you are like a wife to him, a mother to her. I know you call her “Daughter Anna”—you must know how that hurts. You have all I haven’t and take what little I have too. But then, I am glad Anna has you to look to; it would be sad if I were her only example. This way she has known someone who will be remembered. For I have no doubt that your name will be entered in the history books: you were one of the first women to fight for and gain entrance into universities; your stories, novels, and numerous essays, and certainly *A Struggle for God* (written when you were only twenty-four!) will surely be on library shelves; and if all that is not enough, your mere association with people like Rée, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Sigmund, will have you remembered.

I too have been so associated. Almost all of my life, and on terms you’ll never know. But that will not be a reason for me to be remembered. Wives are peculiarly exempt from that kind of notice.

Before I close, Lou, there is one last thing I’d like to mention: the ring, of course. Another reason for jealousy, you might be thinking, since Sigmund has just bestowed upon you this symbol of his trust, this token of acceptance into his charmed circle—a circle from which, though it includes even wives of friends, I have been excluded. But no, not jealousy. Not this time. It is, rather, pride that I feel. And this is the last thing that I want you to know: in spite of everything else, I am proud *not* to be a minister of psychoanalysis, not to be a disciple of Freud—not to wear his ring.

Martha Bernays

# The Grapes

Dearest Deborah,

Please reconsider! You know you can come here too—there’s room for three! He who presumes to justify the ways of God to man, cannot ever hope to justify his own ways to his daughters!

For a man so very interested in education, he was quite disinterested in ours. Oh he was willing to spend a great deal for the education of his nephew, but for his daughters? Nothing. He took care to teach us only what we’d need to know to be his servants. Don’t you remember Deb, the hours of drill in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syrian, Italian, Spanish, French? Don’t you remember the boredom, the frustration, reading pages and pages we didn’t understand? But that was fine—*he* understood it. And make no mistake, we were to read *for him*, not for ourselves. He used to joke, don’t you remember, “one tongue is enough for a woman”. He insisted that our minds were “infantile”—minds that at ten and twelve years of age could be taught to read aloud in seven languages.

Then when our ‘whining’ finally got too disturbing, he sent us here to learn gold and silver embroidery. This is our education! But of course, it isn’t us he is thinking about at all: it is well known what a luxury gold and silvering is considered to be, and therefore what status it confers on the father who is able to send his daughters for such training.

Well, *two* of his daughters—Deb, come join us! Does he still call you in the middle of the night to take down his precious verses, complaining that he “wants to be milked”? (How apt for such a cow, such a stupid beast!) I remember that

whenever we grumbled about it, rubbing our eyes, stumbling with the candle, he would make *such* a fuss, be *so* appalled, and insist that *that* was when Inspiration chanced to light upon him, and it *must* be obeyed. Inspiration, hell! That man never had an inspired thought in all his life. He *chose* to think about his work at that hour—then *he* needed to be obeyed. That whole routine made him feel like God's chosen messenger.

Deborah, why *do* you stay? Do you think for your pains you will get gratitude? Recognition? You should know by now, you won't—not from him or from anyone else. Why, you too have heard his comments: "I looked that my vineyard should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." And he's not the only one: just the other day I read that "Milton's daughters chose to reject the fair repute that simple fulfillment of evident duty would've brought them." "Evident duty"? What of his to us? "Simple fulfillment"? Let them live with him for but a day! Why, we are "damned to everlasting fame . . . as embittering his existence"! Is that recognition? Gratitude? I wouldn't be surprised if historians refuse to even name you as his amanuensis. And don't count on his will for recompense.

Don't you see that by not providing us with a real education, he has silenced us, withheld from us a voice? (And this from a man who writes so strongly *against* censorship!) Or at least he crippled what voice we had—poor Anne, she still cannot speak easily. Do you know why she has that impediment? It's not from birth: it's because every time she opened her mouth to say something, he insulted her, mocked her, sneered at her—or if she was lucky, just ignored her. It's no wonder she couldn't even write her name for the longest time—without a voice, one has little identity.

Deb, you should come too. Let him know what it's really like to be blind, to be handicapped, disadvantaged, to be denied certain opportunities, certain possibilities, to be dependent, to have to have others speak for you, unable to speak for oneself— We know, because we are uneducated, because we are women in his world.

love,

Mary

# The Dialogue

Lasthenia, your beard is slipping.

Why thank you.

Did you get the mathematics done?

No. And I tried so hard, Axio, after you left last night. I worked at it for another two *hours*. It's just not clear at all. Can you help me again tonight?

All right—I should be able to get away.

Wonderful!!

Lasthenia, *please* be more discreet passing these notes back and forth. People will begin to notice us.

Well maybe it's time they did. I get so angry! None of the other students have to pass notes, they murmur freely to each other whenever they have something to say. (Which is all the time.)

None of the other students have soprano voices.

None that we know of. Haven't you wondered about that new student? The one who sits in the back—never says a word—      Also has a beard.

Stop now, Plato has come in.

See that's the problem with this disguise. Not only does it cut us off from the men, it cuts us off from each other too.

But otherwise we couldn't be here, and we'd be even more cut off. Now *please!* If Plato sees us, he'll think we aren't paying attention, and I'd hate to offend him so!

Do you think he's going to continue with the concept of justice? I was thinking about that on my way here this morning. And I think the problem is that we associate justice with goodness. Look what happens if we *don't* do that: something can be just without necessarily being good.

That's an interesting idea. So the person to whom the guns were entrusted gives them back when the owner, though no longer in his right mind, requests them—the action can indeed be just, but not good.

Yes, and it can be *just* to charge everyone the same amount (or to charge anything at all) for medical services, but not *good*.

But that doesn't get us any closer to defining justice, to deciding what is and is not just.

Well to me, it's a lot like mathematics.

Meaning you don't understand it?

Very funny. No, meaning it's a matter of equations, of strict equivalences.

Go on.

Well that's all very fine with numerical relations, but it's impossible in human relations—unless we treat people like numbers. An example: for one child, taking away a toy is punishment, for another, the mere suggestion of it is enough.

Because the children are different emotionally, the impact will be the same even the action needs to be different.

Exactly, because numbers just have quantity, but people have quality as well—emotional quality, physiological quality, situational quality.

Hm. So are we saying justice has no place in human relations?

Oh shit, Aristotle's getting up to speak. If he rants and raves about women again like he did yesterday, I swear I won't be silent this time.

No, Lasthenia, you mustn't! If you speak out, all will be lost!

If I *don't*, all will be lost. If he's allowed to continue, uncontested, he will soon persuade the others—you know how he can talk. And he's rich too.

So?

Well, don't you see? Plato is getting old. Unless he names a successor, the Academy will close, then Aristotle will open his own school. He knows Plato will never ask him to carry on the Academy, his ideas are too different. And as far as I know, he hasn't named anyone. Has he sent any word to you about it?

To me?

Well why not? You heard what Speusippus said he said about you, "Axiotheo alone has the mind bright enough to grasp my ideas."

Yes but that doesn't mean he's going to name me his successor. Sometimes I think he knows I'm really Axiothea. And he knows as well as I that if the next director were a woman, the state would stop its funding. And unlike Aristotle, my father is not physician to the King—I have no private backing to keep a school going.

What about Samothea? She was head of the Hyperborean University in Cornwall.

True enough. I don't know how she managed. I would think enrolment as well as funding would decrease. But she's a Briton, things must be different there. No, Plato would be wise to name Lycurgus or Demosthenes.

Those airheads? Maybe they speak well, but they say nothing.

How would you know? You never listen! You're always too busy distracting me with these notes!

I listen when there's something worth listening to. And Aristotle is not worth listening to.

Give him a chance.

A *chance*? Did you hear what he just said? Axio, I have to speak out!

No, Lasthenia, be careful of winning a battle only to lose a war! The time isn't right!

The time is never right!

That's not true. Wait until this mess with the Macedonians has passed. Everything's at loose ends now, our voice will get lost.

But when everything's tight, there's no room for our voice.

No, listen, we have to wait until the men feel secure. If we rise now, we're just one more threat. Their response will be irrational, flung out of fear. When things are settled, when they are sure of their own position, then they can listen to the arguments about ours.

No! They were 'secure' last century. And look what happened. Already Aspasia and Diotima are unacknowledged, forgotten. We hear only of Socrates, not of the women who taught him. And yet Diotima's social philosophy and her theories on nature have never been surpassed. And Elpinice and Aglaonice—what has happened to them, to their work? The surer the men get of their 'position', the surer they are to 'put us in ours'! Perictyone alone is

remembered, her papers are still read, but only because she's Plato's mother; you watch, as soon as he's dead, she'll be buried too!

No, that won't happen, I don't believe it!

It will! Axio, it has! Who is credited with the golden mean concept? Pythagoras, not Theano! She was brilliant! Mathematics, medicine, physics, psychology, named successor to his Institute at Croton—but is her name ever mentioned? And Theoclea, and Myla, Arignote, Damo— Axio, it's gone on long enough! We *have* to do something, we *have* to speak out!

We?

No—you're quite right—you!

Me?! You're crazy! Why me?

Well no one knows me from a hole in the ground. But if *Axio*—if Axio stands up as a *woman*— Plato will *have* to acknowledge you! You're his favourite—he'll have to *support* you! And so will all the other students: either that or retract their past judgements, admit error. And you know how unlikely that is.

Oh Lasthenia, I don't know. You don't know what you're asking. As I said, I think Plato knows. And if I expose myself, I expose him. I'd be putting him in a very awkward position. You're right, he *is* old, and what with the way things are, he may lose the Academy altogether if I— No. I *owe* him, he's let me attend his classes, even though I *am* a woman.

*You'd* be putting *him* in an awkward position? Look at us! Plato has given you *less* than you deserve! That's no cause for gratitude! You owe him nothing!

But Lasthenia, you're exaggerating about Aristotle. His system of formal logic, remember his seminar last week? You must admit that what he proposes is an excellent way of thinking.

Does he think *we're* capable of it?

His three types of soul, vegetative, sensitive, rational—

Ask him which type women have.

Happiness as the aim of all human action—

*Whose* happiness?

Lasthenia, he's *not* that bad!

Axio *listen* to him! “For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male”—not that bad??

Axio, I beg you—think of Arete. She’s eleven now. In a few years, she’ll be ready to come to the Academy, she can’t learn everything from her father. She’s very bright, you know that. I gave her Perictyone’s paper *On Wisdom* to read a fortnight ago. Do you know, she understood it? And questioned very well! Do you want her to bind her breasts too, paste on a beard and learn to swagger—do you condemn her as well to silence in school?

All right. All right. Maybe it *is* time. But Lasthenia, I can’t stand up to Aristotle.

What do you mean you can’t stand up to Aristotle! For a man interested in empirical data, he seems positively blind to the reality of women. Just tell him the facts, tell him what we can do, what we are. And his logic—it’s so weak, even *I* could make it collapse.

But look at who’s here—they’ll laugh— I can’t speak. I’ll squeak.

Axio, I’ve heard you speak. You’re intelligent, you’re articulate—you *can so* speak. Just pretend you’re speaking to me Axio, as you do every evening—go, you can do it!



IV

SOLILOQUIES



# Ophelia

O what a noble mind is here at last uncover'd!  
The glass of fashion, the mold of form  
Is quite dash'd against the stone;  
The shattered pieces lie at my feet.  
My thoughts, my feelings,  
Once fixed, encased in crystal,  
Breathe and blow in the quick'ning wind  
Like petals. Once pale, now pulsing,  
Rich, and rainbowed, come!  
I beseech thee, attend and heed  
As I the shards examine.

Laertes, brother, you insult to suggest  
Hamlet's love impermanent  
For his choice must be queen  
As well as wife: Am I not worthy?  
Further, you warn caution,  
Lest I my 'chaste treasure open':  
I am mistress of my self!  
And since more than a man, I pay the cost,  
Then more, not less, do I take such care.  
Lastly, you say 'safety lies in fear':  
I have grown weary of being afraid,  
Of being made to feel afraid; I yearn

To meet the day and greet the night  
 Unafraid—as men are wont to do.  
 And I crave to love with opening arms—  
 So tell me not to hide my heart  
 Lest my desire lead him to abandon  
 Restraint, and madly ravish—would it be so?  
 (Or do you extend to all of your kind  
 Knowledge of your self alone?)

Father, your words are as out of tune.  
 You say I do not understand myself  
 And see me still an infant babe,  
 For by foil you would then appear the more mature:  
 Is contrast your only proof of wisdom and worth?  
 (Alas, all cowards and chameleons create their colour  
 From what is without, not what is within.)  
 And you instruct me to ‘set my entreatments at a higher rate’  
 As if I am some prize! Do you think me a whore,  
 That my presence must be paid for?  
 Then you claim *he* may walk with a larger tether  
 (As if we were but animals!): Why do you grant him  
 More freedom than I?  
 Why does Laertes go to Paris (and not I)  
 When you know his simple mind so well  
 You sent another to be guardian?  
 I pray thee, Father, reconsider—  
 Is it because your own judgement is faulty  
 That you do not trust mine?  
 Hamlet is a fine man, soldier, scholar, courtier,  
 A prince! And I judge him to be sincere.  
 Is that not enough?  
 No, indeed, that is nothing, for lastly  
 You tell me to forsake him—forever!



My father's glance had soiled those pages,  
 And for that I almost willingly returned them  
 But to ask for more!  
 When finally I was permitted to reach out to you,  
 To speak with you, perchance to touch you—  
 Did you not see my hand tremble as I held  
 Our hearts between us? Could you not tell?  
 Did you not know?                      No, you did not.  
 Or could not. Perhaps would not.  
 And I wondered, what love is this  
 So blind to my state,  
 So focused on your own?  
 (You have the luxury of feigning  
 What I was truly fighting!)  
 You thought to fool with me:  
 I loved you, I loved you not,  
 Carelessly plucking the petals of my heart  
 One by one, finally crying out  
 'Get thee to a nunnery!'  
 Did you think me that cold, that bereft of desire?  
 Or, unable to have me, did you wish no one to?  
 Or did you think me pure, too pure for the arrant knave?  
 I pray thee, do not set me upon a pedestal,  
 An angel or a saint—allow me to be human:  
 I bleed, I desire—                      Is that it?  
 Desiring, am I thus *impure*, fit only for a 'nunnery'?

Then, sitting near to see the players,  
 Did you think yourself a member of the troupe  
 To be playing thus with me?  
 Your closeness, your words, taunting me—  
 For desire's restraint or for its absence?  
 I was as fever'd as you were cold.

But you could not see at all,  
 So much it pleased you to be the wronged,  
 Poor little Hamlet, hard done by  
 His uncle, his mother, his sweetheart.  
 There was a line, not unnoticed,  
 'A woman's love is brief':  
 The brevity of my love is but a measure  
 Of the weakness of yours.

Pray, what is the source

Of your sudden loss of faith in me?  
 You think I betrayed you, used you,  
 Played pawn of the King and Queen:  
 But they merely sought to learn  
 The cause of your madness,  
 A knowledge I too desired—  
 (Was it your love for me?)  
 Why did you doubt me so?  
 Ah—'your mother, your sweetheart'—  
 Your mother is unfaithful therefore I must be;  
 Your mother fickle, therefore I fickle;  
 Your mother's love brief, mine too.  
 Hamlet, I am as different from your mother  
 As I am from you.  
 Like the child who calls all furry creatures 'dogs'  
 You think that because we share sex  
 We share all else as well.  
 I would as easily say that because my father  
 Is a cowardly fool, so too are you.  
 (An opinion not unworthy of consideration, now—  
 Perhaps it was you who used me—  
 Your lusty talk not for my ears but for theirs,  
 So they might conclude your madness unrequited love—  
 A perfect decoy for your petty plan

Of avenging unrequited hate.)

And then that second time you came to me,  
 Disturbed and in despair, you burst into my chamber  
 As I lie in bed still flushed and confused—  
*That* night you come to me, so full of delighted rage,  
 Your uncle's guilt finally exposed,  
 But your inability to kill the King persisting  
 And frustrating your filial duty, your honour,  
 You tell me then you have killed my father,  
 Mistaking him for another, and though racked  
 With the pain of love for your mother  
 You effect a turbulent reconciliation,  
 Burning still you babble on of your father  
 That he appeared to you again.  
 Thus you come to me, all empty and full too—  
 And what am I to do but take you in my arms,  
 Take you to my bed, calm you, comfort you,  
 I loved you!                    And I am pained to admit  
 My father dead and Laertes now abroad,  
 Nothing could prevent the consummation  
 Of our love and our desire.  
 I said yes, my father's blood on your fingers  
 To be mixed with my own maidenhood blood,  
 And I said yes, to prove my love,  
 To show you finally what I truly felt,  
 To erase that past of forced and frigid distance.  
 Love's restraint hath increased its fire, I said yes  
 To make you believe, make you see  
 This is what I am to you, this is what you are to me,  
 And nothing less, I said yes to love you.  
 Taking you in my arms, gently, tenderly,  
 Soothing your passion 'till another took its place,

All night we held fast, all night we loved.

And in the morning, love,

In the morning I awake and you are not there.

My bed is empty and I fear I have dreamt

But no—I hear it said you have left for England.

What news is this?

You left no word, no explanation,

And I beat my breast flinging myself down,

Wondering have you played with me yet again?

I love you, I love you not!

Perhaps they tell true and I took to my bed

My father's murderer, and not my love.

He has left, and I am the fool,

No, there must be a reason, I resist—

But then you send a letter to Horatio

And there is none for me.

Tormented, I wander for days, how should I

Your true love know from another one?

Now you seem dead and gone

And I a maid at your window,

To be your Valentine;

But up he rose and donned his clothes

And dupped the chamber door,

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more.

Young men will do't, if they come to it

By cock, they are to blame.

And will 'a not come again?

I wander'd thus a while, alas,

They thought me a poor virgin,

Loosed by insanity, mourning for my father;

But they did not know in whose bed



And my kirtle, velvet and voluminous,

I had but little chance.

Struggling with tens of tiny buttons and ties,

I could not get it off in time.

No, I could not free myself soon enough—

For I was the more deceived

To obey, to submit, to accept.

To wear my thoughts like garments

Fitting to the fashions of time and place

But that hinder and hide the self.

'Tis sad we seldom know what we are

And less what we may be.

But I do know now what I think:

Again, projection is all.

Hamlet, you tried to cast off your desire,

That constant source of frustration—

But alas you could not, and so instead

You sought to strip me of mine.

In your diversion with revenge and hatred,

You realized your love for me was brief—

And so you accused me and mine of brevity.

In your heart, loving your mother instead,

You were the unfaithful one—

And so called me fickle.

Incapable of strong belief and trust,

Doubting, vacillating, questioning all—

You take the mirror for glass and see me instead.

Guilty of dissembling and deceiving

With a mockery of madness and *The Mousetrap*—

You call upon my face-painting with disgust.

And last, you punish me for acting

With simple allegiance and obedience  
 To my duty toward my father—  
 Yet you have done the very same,  
 Pursuing to a far ghaselier end  
 The duty to yours.

          Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet—  
 Everything you are that displeases you,  
 Everything that you cannot look at in yourself,  
 You have projected upon me, you see in me.  
 Well I have cast that glass in splinters upon the floor!  
 I am more and different than what you want to see.  
 The mold is broken, no more to be filled  
 With your frustrated dreams and fearful dreads.

(Soft, I have garlands still of flowers sweet—  
 No fennel, nor columbine,  
 The violets have withered,  
 And the daisies have been plucked.  
 There is some rue for all,  
 And for Hamlet, here's rosemary:  
 I did love you once.  
 And here is pansies, that's for thoughts.

  And for myself,  
 T'have seen what I have seen, to see what I see  
 A single dogrose, rubied and free.)

# Lady MacBeth

I didn't kill myself either.

I outperformed them in their own play.

So they removed me as well

To the realm of insanity

And then

they killed me.





I was bound by a duty  
To obey, to honour, to love,  
As Cordelia so clearly expressed—  
There is that bond  
That binds.  
But soon it always hurt,  
And time after time I would scream until nurse came  
To hush up my cries and my bleeding  
And lead me limping from the King's chambers.

Like the hymen of my innocence  
That bond is now broken.  
Cordelia, alas, cannot remember  
And thus is still in favour;  
I, however, cannot forget.

I hear you protest:  
This is not at all suggested in the play!  
No. It isn't. Not at all.  
But Lear was a man, and a king,  
And both are desperate  
For power, control, male progeny:  
He had three daughters, and no longer a wife,  
To provide these services,  
He had three daughters;  
And we know that one in every six—

But no, there is nothing in the play  
To suggest any of this.

## Portia

If I'm the one with the property  
You'd think I'd be the buyer  
Not the bought;  
A lot of faith my father has in me:  
He distrusts my ability to judge, to discriminate—  
A decision made by chance,  
A decision inevitably and ultimately irrational,  
Is preferable to a decision made by me.

    But no, you say,  
The decision was not to be by chance  
But choice, and thus reveal the suitor's character—  
That is, he who chose lead would be wise,  
To forsake appearance, and realize its irrelevance;  
True, but you forget the inscription:  
To choose lead, to choose 'to give and hazard all'  
Is to my mind *not* wise,  
For its foolish risk (all!);  
Is it not better to choose silver,  
And 'get what one deserves'?  
It seems to me a mature perspective;  
So, to judge by appearance  
(And thus forsake appearance)  
Or to judge by words  
—That is the choice.  
Words have meaning,  
And unless the words be false or deceiving,

Is it not better to judge according to content,  
 Than to judge according to form  
 To substance, rather than pretence?  
 So if it was to be a test of character,  
 'twas thus a poor test,  
 For who was to guess what my father intended:  
 The form did contradict the content;  
 And so choice becomes chance, after all.

That *I* am not allowed to choose  
 Is in principle, intolerable,  
 But in practice, just as well—  
 For there is really not a one worth choosing:  
 A prince who boasts of his precious Porsche  
 And can fix it himself;  
 The County Palatine, who believes  
 A real man never smiles;  
 Falconbridge, a pin-up boy  
 With a mind as two-dimensional;  
 A Scottish Lord interested in nothing  
 But a good fight;  
 An alcoholic (the duke's nephew, yes);  
 The Prince of Morocco, a blood-thirsty Rambo;  
 And Bassanio, attracted by wealth and beauty,  
 Willing in a moment to sacrifice his wife for his friend.  
 There is not one.

If I so despise men,  
 Why did I disguise as one?  
 'twas not my choice:  
 Shakespeare (a man) created my costume  
 (And that of Viola and Rosalind),  
 And in his cowardice, he refused to challenge the reality  
 That to be able to interact  
 Without having to defend against

Sexual or romantic intentions,  
 One must be male;  
 That to be taken seriously,  
 And to be exempt from compliments that essentially trivialize  
 One must be male;  
 That to be effective at an endeavour  
 Of the intellectual arts,  
 One must be male;  
 That to be dominant, influential, powerful,  
 One must be male  
 In patterns of appearance, behaviour, speech, and thought  
     —Patterns of thought?  
 But didn't I put forward  
 The feminine concept of mercy over justice?  
 Didn't care and compassion win over fairness?  
     No, look again:  
 The Duke first pleaded for mercy, not I;  
 My case was won on a technicality,  
 On the letter of the law.  
 (Though it is worth mention  
 That recourse to such a legal loophole  
 Was my last resort.)  
 The masculist mode won out;  
 But this is not surprising in a masculist court.

Where there is no challenge,  
 There can be no change.  
 For when the disguise is finally revealed  
 It is not recognized  
 That to be what I was (what I am)  
     One can be female—  
 It is recognized only that I *am* female.  
 And their response concerns only themselves—  
 Relief, that they won't be cuckolds.



# Desdemona

Accused of *infidelity*:

I pray thee, what is infidelity?

A lack, a lack of 'faithfulness', of 'loyalty'

A lack of 'strict conformity to truth or fact' —

Pray tell, what fact?

Why, the fact of our marriage

Of our marital contract —

You accuse me of a breach of contract, then?

(And for a breach of contract,

You sentence me to death?)

'Tis true, I did make certain agreements —

To *love* you alone?

Or to express love *physically* to you alone?

Aye, to *have sex* with you alone?

*You alone*

This is important, this singleness, this monogamy

For it enrages you to see me 'for others' use';

Perhaps this ownership is indeed legal —

but is it truth or fact?

(Other's *use*? Think me a *thing*?)

Would you have me agree to love no other?

Then 'tis a cold heart you want.

And am I to please none but you?

Alas, to be so unkind—  
 To find pleasure in none other?  
 But this is a lie!  
 (Is it a wound too?)

Perhaps you have the child in mind  
 And rage like Hermione's husband,  
 'I'll not rear another's issue'  
 But where is the comradeship  
 You feel with other men?  
 Is it false, that love for your fellow-in-arms?  
 A child is no more a possession than a woman,  
 And every child needs nurturance—  
 Why should you withhold what is yours to give?

Do you think, like Imogen's husband,  
 That if I am unfaithful, I am worthless?  
 That all of my value is in my sex?  
 Surely you did not marry without regard for other virtues.  
 Is it because I am of worth  
 Only to the extent I am of worth to you?  
 Come, did I marry one so self-centered?  
 If I am unfaithful 'then all men are bastards'!  
 Only if you believe legitimacy resides with (legal) paternity.  
 Only if you believe in *il*legitimacy:  
 Surely all children are legitimate!  
 Thus 'tis not my infidelity makes you bastard,  
 But your belief!  
 (It also makes you stupid:  
 Why would you make *your* legitimacy  
 Depend on *my* faithfulness?  
 Surely to allow me this power  
 Confounds your drive for dominance—)

*Accused of infidelity:*

I care for Cassio, 'tis true,

And am therefore affectionate with him—

But must all touch between male and female be sexual?

I think not. Thus I have been accused without cause,

That is, no cause but your jealousy

(Which is your ego which is your fear

—And they say *wē* are the ones ruled by emotion)

And the words of your friend.

We too have words, Emilia and I and all of the others,

We also speak:

But either you don't believe us

And so we are killed,

Or you do believe us

—and so we are killed.



## Kate

With great disturbance, I hear it said  
My story doth much to entertain,  
'Tis light and with a happy end,  
In short, 'tis thought a comedy!

Dost thou laugh to see a shrew?  
Indeed, I pray thee, what is a shrew?  
What am I that I be so named?  
'Tis said I am froward and I vow 'tis true—  
But for a man to be so bold is not a fault.  
And some doth complain o' my scolding tongue—  
Then I am wisely critical, not content  
With any and all. Others bewail  
I am wilful, with strong spirits—  
But I see a woman may be made a fool  
If she hath not a spirit to resist,  
And surely in a man this is much applauded.  
Further, 'tis said, I am bitter and bad-tempered—  
I pray thee, what is the standard of measure?  
'Tis true I am not mild, but neither is my father  
Yet none doth therefore curse *his* name.  
I am more strained than pleasant, I confess  
But methinks perchance you would be too:  
To be auctioned off as a piece of chattel,

To know the suitors who come  
 Court your father's wealth—  
 'Tis not my mind to smile at greed;  
 And to know that my father will give his money  
 To a man who is a stranger  
 'Fore he will give it to his own daughter—  
 How shall I be sweet under that offense?

I ask again, then, what is a shrew?  
 Observe and see that any man  
 Not favoured by a certain woman  
 Will fall to insult and slander anon.  
 Witness Hortensio, who once called her jewel,  
 Doth declare Bianca a disdainful haggard  
 As soon as she prefers another.  
 Thus, all I have done to gain this name  
 Is fail to praise and stroke men's pride.

Perhaps thou dost laugh to see me tamed?  
 I think it sad to make all alike,  
 To force the spirited to be subdued.  
 Do you find it amusing to see me starved  
 Of food and sleep 'till I am giddy,  
 Weak of mind and body? To see me subject  
 To Petruchio's emotional whips and whims:  
 He presents a feast then throws it out  
 Or allows instead another to eat.  
 He gives me a beautiful cap and gown  
 Then rips it to shreds before my eyes.  
 He offers me everything then takes it away.  
 Back and forth, up and down—to be sure it overcomes,  
 This confusion, fear, and exhaustion.

To see me tamed.

Only a man blinded by some grand fantasy  
 Would call me tamed. Any woman is suspect.  
 My final speech is odd, unexpected.  
 One can see neither reason nor cause  
 For this absolute and sudden change.  
 'Tis true. One sees it not.  
 For it lies in an unwritten scene.  
 Heed not that speech of obedience and submission—  
 'Twas made with Petruchio near  
 And therefore under unspoken threat.  
 Did ye not notice Act Four?  
 In scene one, my arrival, he begins his plan,  
 Depriving me of food and sleep.  
 By scene three, my body is weak and begging,  
 Though my spirit still resists.  
 He toys with me, dismisses the tailor,  
 And announces anon we are to travel  
 To my father's house. On the road  
 In scene five, it is a mere eleven lines  
 'Till I submit and agree with his every word.  
 Did you not wonder what happened between,  
 While the men bought and sold my sister?

I was beaten.

And I mean not to speak in metaphor.  
 You know well that Petruchio strikes  
 His other servants, doth it surprise thee then  
 That he struck me? Over and again—  
 He locked the room, 'trusted Grumio as guard—  
 And therefore, on the road, to my father's house,  
 You see, that was my escape:  
 I could not have left alone,  
 His servants in league, under similar fear,

And even if I got away, perchance along the—  
—At least Petruchio was only one.

But what then to do? Whither should I go?  
If I confess to father, would he believe me?  
He cannot, for he has given the dowry—  
It and I belong to Petruchio,  
And he has not the money to sell me to another  
(Even if that be possible).  
I cannot live at home forever  
(Would that he take me back),  
He'd be the laughing stock of the town,  
A married then unmarried shrew.  
I cannot go out on my own—  
I have no money, and it is only to be made  
As strumpet.  
No, that marriage had to be, whatever the price.  
And, I'd already enough humiliation:  
To go and then come back would be worse  
Far worse than it was not going,  
No one else would have me,  
And I shall not dance barefoot,  
Nor shall Bianca be made to wait again.  
Is't not then the answer  
To submit while he is near and pretend to be his  
So at all other times, I can truly be mine own?  
Having house and food is much—  
And anon, I trust, he will travel oft away—  
'Twas a bargain: prisoner to him  
For freedom from the rest.  
Lip service was all—usually—  
And if a word spoken against my will  
Can stop a blow against my body—

Well, you heard the speech.

Yet soft, 'twas not all false:

Carefully I say women are simple  
To offer war when they are bound to serve,  
Love and obey. And they *are* bound.  
But not by God or nature, no—  
By commerce and social custom alone  
Is thy husband thy lord, thy life, thy keeper.  
Remember that, I pray thee.

Is't not then tragedy, to name me shrew?  
And worse, to seek to tame such a one?  
Worse still is't to call the end gay;  
But the worst tragedy is to be entertained by it,  
To take it not seriously,  
Indeed to call it, my story, comedy.

(But fast, I'll tell thee the comedy:  
Hast thou forgotten 'twas a play within a play?  
Remember ye not Sly, the drunkard, and the noble man?  
The old version ends not with me  
But with Sly, just as it began:  
The story was part of a dream.  
To be sure, a sick dream, and a dangerous one too,  
Nevertheless, 'twas a male fantasy:  
To be honourable, to be wealthy, to be powerful.  
But recall, alas, 'twas also a joke,  
Played on the drunkard by the other:  
And to be sure, that women should be  
So obedient and submissive to men—  
Aye, that 'tis a laugh!)



# Isabella

You ask, will I choose to sacrifice my honour  
Just to save this man's life?  
—Of course!

'Tis said the crime is premarital sex:  
But methinks it curious that the crime takes two  
And the penalty but one;  
The arm of the law reaches only for the man  
And thus doth imply that only he  
Is expected, is allowed, to take the initiative.  
And thus the blame.  
Though let me assure,  
'Tis only in the eyes of the law I speak.  
But the law is made by men—  
Why do they decree sole responsibility for the act?  
Because they desire sole right to the result!  
Men, you must know, cannot accept death—  
'Tis a blow to their ego, their delusion of divinity;  
And so they invented Heaven and Hell  
And Patrilineage.  
For a son who inherits his father's body,  
Will also receive his father's estate,  
And is expected as well to inherit his ambitions—  
Thus can a man live forever!

Therefore you can see 'tis of utmost importance  
To know which are one's sons.  
This can be done by controlling the women—  
That is to say, their sexual behaviour;  
So they invented also the Marital Contract.  
Which makes premarital sex a crime.  
Against the male ego.  
(In more ways than one:  
It allows women to compare  
And perchance find men lacking!)

I do not subscribe to such a denial  
Of the autonomy of children—  
They are not means to another's end,  
They have ambitions of their own;  
Or of the power of women—  
'Tis said if you are neither maid,  
Nor widow, nor wife,  
You are nothing;  
'Tis a vain thought:  
Our sexuality exists independent  
Of our relationships to men,  
And we may choose to express it or not  
Equally independently.

And so, of course, I choose yes:  
'Tis no crime to me—  
Just because men's honour hangs between their legs,  
Doesn't mean a woman's resides there as well.

# Juliet

Romeo, Romeo,  
Where the hell art thou?

Have you stopped along the way  
To play at your stupid battle games?

Or have you changed your mind,  
And decided not to come  
Thinking me too 'easy' and thus insincere:  
What perversion of thought is this?  
Because I say what it is I want,  
Direct and forthright,  
You judge my desire false?  
While the one who dallies,  
Says no to mean yes,  
You deem true and take her  
Seriously?  
Or perhaps you think to be 'easy' is to be unchaste:  
If so, you misjudge  
Yourself!  
Because I want you (I want you)  
Does in no way mean  
I am a woman who wants every man.  
Do you think of yourself so poorly?





Make me cry out  
 For more!  
 Come, Romeo, come  
 Come,  
 Oh,  
 Come!

Nurse laughs to see me so—  
 (Though mother would faint,  
 Still confusing innocence with ignorance)  
 Young love, she mutters, fanning my face;  
 But I protest, 'tis not love,  
 Not of ones so young,  
 Nor of ones just met—  
 Let us be clear:  
 Yours was an artful come-on  
 ('Let lips do what hands do')  
 For a classic pick-up—  
 'Tis young lust, I tell her true:  
 I want sex  
 With a desire pure as the lace on my bodice;  
 She clucks to hear me talk so,  
 And I would persist—  
 But what's in a name?  
 That which we call making love  
 By any other name  
 Feels as good.

# Marina

I was not released untouched  
I did not escape from the brothel  
To a life of self-support teaching music and dance.

No.

I was sold as a virgin for a very high price  
Seven times on that first day.  
Raped and ripped by ordinary men  
Then sewed up tight by a profiteering pimp,  
To be convincingly torn apart again.  
Seven times on that first day.

I don't remember the second day, at all.

But after I was thus initiated, broken in,  
Broken,  
I was put into regular service with the other three.  
Mounted, ridden, beaten, gored,  
Gouged, maimed, ploughed, rutted,  
Ravished.  
Continuously.

For room and board.

The Mayor would come often  
Seeking a cure for his syphilis.  
'How much for a dozen virgins?'  
He would laugh and grin broadly.  
I would suffice, no virgin,  
But still a year under twelve.

In time, my sores were open, bleeding,  
My eyes reddened, the fever came,  
I could not eat for days,  
—I did become insane.

And shortly thereafter,  
I died.

(No music. No dance.)

# Miranda

Why has she no mother?  
Why have I no mother?  
Nor Ophelia, Portia, Kate, Cordelia, Hermia,  
Indeed, none but Juliet?

I'll tell thee:

'Tis an obsession with the male.  
Consider Prospero, my good father,  
'The male as authority' —  
For 'tis to you, father, I must direct my questions  
There being none other to answer,  
'Cept Caliban who though half beast  
Is also (perchance moreso) male.  
(And when there arrive a multitude of others,  
Strangers to the island from the ship come asunder,  
They too are, alack, every one of them male.)  
You doth also seem to be 'the male as power' —  
You are parent and thus hold the natural virtue of veto  
Further, you are conjurer, with unnatural force as well.  
Lastly you are 'the male as protector' —  
For from you comes my safety from hazard and harm  
(Though it seems needed only against others of your kind.)

Next consider Ferdinand,  
It is you I am to see as my saviour,

You have knowledge of the other world,  
 You will release me from the power and authority  
 Of my father. You are my only alternative.  
 But since you are a man, you are not an alternative  
 At all.

'Tis odd this single stress on male—  
 The island is a reversal, not a reflection:  
 For 'tis women who are responsible for the young,  
 'Tis they who manage their education,  
 Their care and survival—not men.  
 This disregard of what is true  
 Can only issue from a mind deprav'd  
 And clouded over by sickness—  
 I fear 'tis envy of the womb:  
 Bereft of female affect, denied female influence,  
 I am totally fashioned, created by man—  
 'Tis a dream perchance of many a small boy  
 Playing with his penis one day  
 And crying out the next that he has no breasts.  
 (Yet 'tis not so simple: this jealousy  
 Of the ultimate power, the power of creation,  
 Raises the woman to great importance  
 And yet at the same time there seems to be  
 A preoccupation with self that  
 Excludes the woman to insignificance.)

Forsooth, 'tis a dream indeed  
 For I am not a vessel to be filled with your desires;  
 That you think me so is plain:  
 Ferdinand, it is clear you are interested  
 Only in my ability to reproduce,  
 For only if a virgin would you make me queen.

(Queer logic this—if it's progeny you want,  
 Better to choose one proven  
 Than one untried and perhaps unable.)  
 You are no better than Caliban  
 Who in arrogance sought to people the isle  
 With copies of himself, and Stephano  
 The would-be king desiring also to propagate.  
 Father, you too are of the same,  
 For when giving, selling me to Ferdinand  
 You paraded as my greatest value  
 My virgin-knot.  
 Moreover, not only into my body but into my soul too  
 Would you thrust your desires:  
 Seeking purity and goodness but failing to attain  
 These qualities yourself, you hoist them upon me;  
 Aghast at the pain and responsibility of knowledge,  
 You would have me remain ignorant;  
 And guilty with experience, you declare me innocent;  
 Despising your own ugliness, you demand beauty in me;  
 And humiliated by the ravages of time passing,  
 You wish me to be forever young.

But I am not a ship at sea  
 To be directed by your hand at the helm:  
 I have my own course,  
 And will not be what you wanted to be  
 And could not become.

'Tis said *The Tempest* is a fitting summation  
 Of all the rest; if that be true  
 Then by rule of logic, all the rest  
 Is unrealistic and unbalanced:  
 For there are two sexes in the world,  
 Of equal representation in quality and quantity.

'Tis said I am the ultimate conception of Woman:  
Young, beautiful, innocent, pure —  
Is this what you want?  
Then 'tis no flesh and blood you want,  
For flesh ages as the years pass;  
And it is not always, not often, beautiful.  
And 'tis not mind, heart, and soul you want,  
For the mind thinks, the heart feels,  
And the soul moves by its own stars.  
What you seem to want is something insubstantial,  
Something of the air perchance.  
Alas, look again, for I am a person  
And not such stuff as dreams are made on.

V

FAIRY TALES



# Gretel

We read fables in school to teach us a lesson. And we read fairy tales at bedtime to put us asleep. And indeed they do: especially those of us, a full half of the human species, who are lulled lower and lower into a semi-conscious state by their lessons.

Remember “Hansel and Gretel”? The one about a little boy and a little girl. Who was me. Not particularly proud of it, but there you go. I didn’t write the story. I didn’t intend those lessons.

That, first, women are deceitful. There are two women in the story, the stepmother and the witch. And both of them lie to us. When Hansel and I are taken into the forest to be left there to die, my stepmother says “We’ll come back for you.” And later, when we meet the witch, she assures us she will “do us no harm”. But of course they didn’t and she did. Both women used deceit to achieve their goals.

That, second, women aren’t very intelligent. It was my stepmother’s idea that a good solution to the food shortage was to leave us in the forest. Why not kill and eat the pigeon or the cat first? Why not hunt for squirrels and rabbits? The witch, as well, wasn’t too brilliant when she climbed into the oven to give a little demonstration.

That, third, little boys are competent and resourceful (and therefore can, and do, take care of little girls, like me). The first time we were taken into the forest, it was Hansel who thought to unravel a spool of thread behind us so we could find our way back. The second time, again he planned for our survival, leaving a trail of crumbs to mark our path. Clever though this was, he didn’t think about the birds, who ate the crumbs. I was quite resigned to our fate; it

was Hansel who refused to give up so easily. Well, as you know, we found our way to a house, but it belonged to the witch and she locked Hansel in a cage. Still using his head, he held out a bone instead of his finger each time she checked to see if he was fat enough to eat.

However, if you've read the story, you'll know that, notwithstanding this glowing portrait of my brother, *I'm* the real hero: it was *my* cleverness that saved us. You'll remember that the witch told me to creep into the oven to see if it was hot enough to bake the bread. I knew, of course, that she was going to slam the door shut and bake me instead. So, I said, ever so sweetly, "I do not know how I am to do it, how do I get in?" You know the rest, I'm sure: she showed me, I shut the door on her, and then I rescued Hansel and together we escaped.

What bothers me is that I had to be clever in *that* way. To this day, I resent having had to resort to that 'dumb blond' ploy. To begin with, because it's just that—a ploy, a disguise, a deceit; and it teaches us that pretence is our best method of operation. So we pretend to be something we're not to get what we want, be it life, love, whatever. But more than that, I resent the ploy because it teaches us that for a woman, ignorance is valuable: it is her defence, her weapon, her salvation.

Why is that so dangerous a lesson, since my ignorance really is just a ploy, and not genuine? Because habits of behaviour become habits of thought which become habits of belief. If I spend most of my life acting like I'm stupid, people will think that I am. And then it's just a short step to actually becoming what people already believe I am.

But if we wake up, we all will live ever after.

# Cinderella

Poor little Cinderella! Who more deserving of finding her prince and turning into a princess! Yeah, right.

First off, Cinderella did *not* have to do all the hardest work in the house. Our stepfather was a man of rank, remember, and my mother no peasant; we had fine rooms and beautiful clothes, and status enough to be invited to the King's ball. So we certainly had maids and servants to scrub the floors and wash the dishes. Cinderella *offered* to help with the work. Probably because she had nothing else to do; she didn't seem interested in much besides pleasing people. Drove me crazy.

And she did *not* have to sleep "in a straw bed in a poor room at the top of the house". Think her father would put up with that? Certainly not. She had a perfectly good bedroom just like the rest of us.

The story goes that my sister and I were proud. True enough. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with being proud of what you can do, of what you've worked hard to learn well? All those gorgeous clothes people kept talking about were of my sister's making—she was into fashion design. And as for me, well, it was known I could ride a horse to win most competitions in the land. So sure we were proud. But vain? Yes, we spent a lot of time in front of that full-length mirror: my sister had to see the effect of her creations (and so I suppose she's as vain as one gets in that line of work), and as a favour, especially on days too wet or too cold for the horses to be out, I often modeled her half-finished pieces for her. But that's it. I wasn't even good-looking, by contemporary standards, no peaches and cream in my complexion!

And it's true, Cinderella wasn't invited to the ball. But only because the

King thought she was too young. And we certainly didn't snub her like you think. We called her into our rooms and asked her for advice on our clothes, to make her feel part of the excitement. She liked that, you know how younger sisters are, she wanted to iron this and mend that—we even let her do our hair.

But we *never* called her Cinder-wench, or actually, even, Cinderella. Her nickname was Kinderella (little child), and somehow the 'K' must have gotten changed to a 'C'.

As for what happened at the ball, that's true too. She was very beautiful, our new little stepsister, we never denied that. And when beauty and wealth come together, most people fall over themselves like asses. Those at the ball were no different: to them, appearance is everything. My sister was stunned by Cinderella's gown, and she gawked, it's true. But out of professional interest, not jealousy as most people think. I wasn't jealous either—I just wanted to ride one of those impressive silver stallions she came with.

And as for that bit about the yellow dress, the story goes that Cinderella asked my sister if she could borrow it to wear at the next ball, and my sister said no way. Well, I don't know, that might've happened, I wasn't there. That yellow dress is one of her favourites, one of the first dresses she made. But I think that if my sister *had* said no, she would've offered another instead. Then again, Cinderella's tone can be so sweet and self-effacing sometimes, I can imagine my sister saying no out of sheer irritation and leaving it at that.

The rest of the story is pretty much accurate. All three of us went to the second ball, Cinderella forgot about her curfew, lost her slipper on the way out, and—there is one thing I want to set straight: I did *not* try on the glass slipper. Quite apart from the fact that I didn't want to marry that prince (or any prince, or anyone at all, actually)—a glass slipper? You've got to be kidding, that'd be worse than wearing high heels! Not only would it make walking difficult, but with the obvious risk of broken glass, cutting, embedding, it would discourage movement altogether. No thank you!

(But as I said to Cinderella, if the shoe fits, wear it.)

(And we *all* will live happily ever after.)

The youngest princess  
(c/o The Enchanted Pig)

My story's pretty much the way it's been told. Except—remember how every night the pig turned into a man? Well they got that backwards.



## Little Red Riding Hood

Once upon a time, I went to visit my grandmother. She'd been mugged recently on her way to sell herbs at her streetcorner stall—some guy wrenched the knapsack right off her back. She wasn't hurt—not physically; she was just a bit disconcerted and low on confidence—at fifty-eight she didn't see herself at all as a little old lady (probably wouldn't at sixty-eight or seventy-eight either), so the attack kind of threw her. I tried to convince her that the same thing could have happened as easily to a man of fifty-eight, but neither of us was fooled for a minute—because it just wouldn't have.

Anyway, there I was, around supptime, making my way through the park, to the other side where she lived. I always came this way, instead of staying on the streets; it was a short cut, and I like the relative quiet and dark.

Sure enough, suddenly this guy is walking along beside me.

“Hi,” he says, in a friendly voice, relaxed, hands in his pocket.

“Hi.” It is so sad that I have to suspect every guy who approaches me.

“Didn't your mother ever tell you not to talk to strangers?” He grins.

“Yeah,” I answer. “And I've always wondered how many neat people she therefore missed meeting.”

He doesn't say anything.

“Besides, not talking to strangers doesn't seem to stop them from attacking you.” There, I've put it out in the open.

He looks at me then, as we keep walking. “Yeah, aren't you afraid to be walking alone at night through here?”

“Afraid of what?”

“Well, of some guy attacking you!” His hands lift out to vaguely gesture.

“What are you suggesting, that I always walk with a buddy, come out only when it’s light, and stay out of parks for the rest of my life?”

“Well, walking with a buddy isn’t a bad idea.” He pauses and slows to turn toward me. “If you want, I could walk with you—”

“You’re offering to escort me?” I ask.

“Yeah,” he smiles, putting his hands back into his pockets.

“But you just finished telling me I should be *afraid* of men, so why should I—”

“Well—” he laughs nervously, and turns to resume our pace.

“Seems to me,” I continue, looking ahead, “if *men* are dangerous, then *they* should be restricted. Maybe *you* shouldn’t be allowed in the park, at night, unguarded.” I look at him.

He casts his eyes down, at the ground ahead of our steps. He is uncomfortable now. I turn away again and continue.

“Look, if there’s a good reason to be afraid, then yes I’ll be afraid. And I’ll deal with the fear, not run away from it.” I stop and confront him then. “Should I be afraid now? Here? Of you?”

He looks at me then looks away. “No,” he says and just stands there, as I keep walking, alone, in the quiet, in the dark.

*Bitch. First she thinks I’m going to attack her, then slaps me in the face when I make a perfectly decent offer to walk with her. Who the hell does she think she is, pretending not to be afraid? Doesn’t even know what’s good for her. Serves her right—I warned her. She’s out here alone at night, she’s asking for it. And she knows it too, she could’ve stayed on the street where it’s safe.*

About a hundred yards from the end, there’s a drinking fountain. He’s waiting there for me—as I expected.

“Listen, I’m sorry,” he falls into step beside me. “Back there, I didn’t mean to be rude—”

“You weren’t. It’s okay.” Shit.

“That’s a nice red sweater,” he tries again to apologize. I look at him like he’s crazy. “It’s a sweatshirt,” I say. “It has a hood. Sweaters don’t have hoods,” I add.

He tries to explain then. “It’s just that, well, you know, I was raised to be

polite to girls, you know, open their doors, look after them—and I just didn't want you to get hurt, that's all—" He's nervous.

"Yeah, okay, it's alright, alright? No hard feelings." Go away, please.

"Look, here's a short cut," he says, as if he were making a final peace offering. "This path here—" he nudges me toward an overgrown path. *Come on babe, we'll have a good time. Don't fight it, you don't stand a chance. I'm bigger than you and—*

"No, it's not. That path stops just after it turns." I call him on it, facing him.

That caught him by surprise and his first blow was a bit off the mark, easy to deflect. I retaliated with a quick kick to his shin. For a second I saw the incredible pain and anger on his face—I wondered if it was from the blow to his shin or to his ego—and his next hit caught me right on. I fell to my knees, the wind knocked out of me. He dragged me up, his arm around my neck. I found my feet—and a knife at my throat. As I lifted my foot to crash down onto his instep, I felt a dull thud and he fell away from me. I turned to see my grandmother, her leg rebounding from the blow to his kidneys. He had twisted and was staggering to stay up, the knife still in his hand. My grandmother's hand sliced down to his collarbone, my foot shot out to his kneecap. We heard two distinct snaps, and he collapsed into a heap.

We fell to each other's hug. Grinning and crying, we babbled, are you alright, yes are you alright, yes, I went to my stall today, was on my way back, saw the struggle from the gateway, I was coming to visit you, how are you, I have some cake and butter, you never buy butter—I found my knapsack on the ground a few yards away, she groped for the knife and put it in with her unsold herbs. And we started to walk home, feeling strong, and safe.

(Who the hell needs the green archer? After all, he might have saved me—for himself. And, really, if Peter can do it, hell, if three little pigs can do it—then we can too.)



# Snow White

I just *told* you who I am! Why are you standin' there smilin' like I'm on somethin'? Don't you give me that look. I am *sober* and I sure as hell know my own name.

The story goes she was “as white as the snow, as red as the blood, and as black as the ebony window frame”. It doesn't say what was white, and what was black. Well as you can see, my skin sure is black. As coal, honey. And my teeth—well they's as white as snow, dontcha think? And since I'm standin' here in this station talkin' to you, I don't need to tell you what part of me is red. On the streets they call me Rosebud. (You thought what? That that was Sleeping Beauty's other name? Well it doesn't surprise me, we got a lot in common, her and me.)

Yeah, yeah, I know what you thought. But what else does a runaway girl do to survive? Especially if she's coloured. There are some lucky enough to be called domestics. The rest of us, well we're called a whole lotta names.

According to the records, nothin! I was maid, mother, *and* mistress! Everything every man wants in a woman. They *all* want someone to clean their house, make their dinner, and wash their underwear; look after their health, and take care o' their hearts; and then suck this, stroke that, and open up there. Nothin' but pick up, pat away, and put out. But smile while you're doin' it, honey, oh yeah, we *gotta* have that service with a smile. Otherwise they might get the idea that you don't like what you're doin', that just maybe they're 'forcing' you. And why that might ruin their sleep at night, y'know?

Let me tell you, *every* man's a dwarf expectin' us to make 'em a giant. That's what we *do*. How's that for a 'job description'? (Kinda fits *every* woman,

doesn't it?) And I'm not just talkin' physical. Sure, there *is* that, why do you think there's so many stories 'bout young girls having to kiss ugly things—Beauty and the Beast, The Frog Prince, The Enchanted Pig—it's great 'career training'. (Though a lot of the time Little Dick stays little no matter what we do. Don' bother me none.) But there's *more* to it than that. We also flatter the man, we listen to him, we obey him—those are the other 'essential job skills'. An' we learn this real quick, see, on account of we get in shit every time we listen to a *woman* because god knows most of them are witches or wicked stepmothers—my own story shows that plain enough!

What? You mean you didn't know the prince was a pimp? Oh come on. He took one look at me and offered to *buy* me! What does that sound like to you? (Good thing I came to when I did, ain't no tellin' what he woulda had done to me comatose—)

So why did I choose to go with him? Sugar, one of these days we're going to have to discuss your understanding of 'choice'. For now, let's just say that bein' in the employ of one man is a helluva lot easier than answerin' to seven.

Hell no, why should I call *him* for bail? I left him long ago, he was just a means to an end, that's all. I'm in business for myself now.

'Course I can take care of it, I belong to a union just like you. We got us a bail fund, don't you worry 'bout it.

What is it you're whinin' about now? The moral of the story's all changed? Well, that depends on what you look at. The way I see it, Snow White is all about resurrection. Always was. Ain't no mistake, the phoenix is female! Three times I rose against the odds of death. The corset and comb sure enough was gonna kill us, but we lived through it—we bust the whalebone and tossed out the tiara! And we learned. What we found out with each bite of that apple was 'bout enough to make us lie down and die. And maybe for a while some of us did. But hell, I'm here ain't I? And honey, let me tell you, I will live ever after!

# Alice

There was once a fisherman who lived with his wife in a ditch, close by the sea-side. (His wife's name was Alice.) The fisherman used to go out all day long a-fishing (maybe that's why they lived in a ditch); and one day, as he sat (on his ass) on the shore with his rod (his rod?—uh-huh—maybe that explains why he liked fishing so much), looking at the shining water and watching his line, all of a sudden his float was dragged away deep under the sea; and in drawing it up he pulled a great fish out of the water.

The fish said to him, "Pray let me live: I am not a real fish; I am an enchanted prince." (Of course.) (No, wait a minute: 'And now *you*, fisherman, must kiss every one of my slimy scales so that I can turn back into the handsome noble prince that I am'—nah, nah, your turn.) (Wait, there's more: 'And then we will marry and the whole kingdom will burn us alive for being faggots . . .' No? Alright, let's go on.) "And since I am a prince, put me in the water again, and let me go."

"Oh," said the man, "you need not make so many words about the matter; I wish to have nothing to do with a fish that can talk; so swim away as soon as you please."

Then he put him back into the water, and the fish darted straight down to the bottom, leaving a long streak of blood behind him.

Then the fisherman went home to his wife (Alice) in the ditch.

"Husband," said the woman (said Alice), "have you caught nothing today?" ('Again?')

"No," said the man, "I did catch a flounder, who said he was an enchanted prince, so I let him go again."

(‘You what?!’) “Did you not ask for anything first?” said the woman (Alice).

“No,” said the man, “what should I wish for?”

(‘What should you wish for? You don’t know? We’ve been living in a ditch—a ditch—for twenty years—and you don’t know what to ask for?!’) “Ah,” said the woman (Alice!), “it is surely hard to have to live in this little ditch; do go back and tell him we want to have a small cottage. He will certainly give us that.”

The fisherman did not much like the business; however, he went to the sea, and when he came there the water looked all yellow and green (that he had just pissed into it may have had something to do with this). And he stood at the water’s edge, and said:

“Oh man of the sea!

Come listen to me,

For Alice my wife

The plague of my life,

Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee!”

Then the fish came swimming to him, and said, “Well, what does she want?”

“Ah,” answered the fisherman, “my wife says that when I had caught you, I ought to have wished for something before I let you go again; she does not like living any longer in the ditch (can’t for the life of me figure out why, suits me fine), and she wants a little cottage.”

“Go home, then,” said the fish, “she is in the cottage already.”

So the man went home, and saw Alice (!) standing at the door of the cottage.

“So what do you think—nice, eh?” she asked her husband (him).

“It’s alright,” he said, as he grabbed a beer and sat down to watch the game.

She went into her new kitchen and started peeling the potatoes. And as she did so, she began thinking (no, this isn’t the magic part). Here I am thirty-five years old, it’s nice to finally have something to show for it. When I think back of all the work I’ve done—I’ve earned a cottage. No—she kept thinking back—I’ve earned a castle!

She got a pencil and a pad of paper (forget the potatoes) and began to figure. I've looked after four kids (they're all gone now—she married at fifteen, and that's about the age they took off—), that's eight hours a day at—how much does a childcare worker get paid?—and then time-and-a-half and overtime to make 24 hours a day, times 365, times 15. And I taught them (kids who live in ditches don't go to school)—how much does a teacher make?—let's say six years of that, no, eight, I think they got as far as grade eight, and then job training, I spent at least two years with each of them to get so they could do something. Okay, now what else? Twenty years of housekeeping—how much does a maid charge per household per month?—times 12, times 20. And cooking, no before that, gardening—or shall I call it farming?—I'll average the two wages—now what would a caterer charge to provide three meals a day to five people (and two dogs, three cats, and—no don't count them)?—times 365, times 20. And part-time nurse, part-time psychiatrist—that's a big one. What else? Oh, sexual services—that much for twenty minutes?—times, times, oh my god—

“Husband, I should like to have a very large stone castle to live in, with central heating, and plumbing, and electricity, and a hot tub, so go to the fish again . . .”

It was so refreshing to have ambitions—realized. And, well, thirty-five is still young, the kids were gone, and the husband required little tending (the castle came with a big screen tv). She knew what she wanted, and her pencil and pad of paper told her she had the qualifications: experience and expertise in resource management (human and other), communications, health and welfare, education, economics (especially deficit budgeting), defence, and foreign affairs (any interaction with her husband could be counted here)—

“Husband, I should like to be King, so go to—”

And so it was that Alice became King of the land.

One of the first things she did was replace private income with a guaranteed income; everyone henceforth would get paid—she consulted her pad of paper, which was covered with wage figures from her previous calculations—the range was sizable, and puzzling—would get paid ten squishes an hour,

and everyone had to work (she looked at her tallies) just eight hours a day. And everyone could work at whatever job they wanted.

Well. Amazing things started happening. Most people quit their present job. It seemed a lot were doing what they were doing because they were forced to or because of the money. For instance, almost all of the doctors quit (and a great number of med students). But since the medical schools were immediately flooded with new students (mostly women and people of colour), and the current doctors agreed to continue until replaced, there was no problem. Almost all of the secretaries quit too, but not too many others wanted their jobs, so people in administrative positions had to do their own typing and filing. This slowed down business, considerably, and clienteles had to be decreased. But since a lot of people wanted to start their own business, to be their own boss, (interestingly, a lot wanted to be bank managers), there was no shortage of services. So what happened was, for instance, there were ten little banks in a town where there used to be one big one.

There were some who predicted certain problems. “What about the people who don’t work eight hours, the ones who slack off, they still get the income, and that’s not fair!”

“You’re quite right,” Alice answered, “that’s not fair. But people slacked off before too, and still got paid.” And, as it turned out, there were fewer slackers now, because people had chosen to do what they were doing.

“What about the people who want to be something and they just can’t—I mean this idealism thing is great in theory, but face it, not everyone can be what they want.”

“Again, this is true,” Alice replied. “But maybe as soon as they’re given the chance, they’ll realize just what they can and can’t do—people can do what they want if they want to do what they can.” And this is exactly what happened. One person had always wanted to be a pilot, but when he was given the chance, when he realized exactly what was involved, what he’d have to learn before even getting into a plane, well, he realized he didn’t really want to be a pilot after all. This happened a lot with jobs that used to pay a lot of money: a lot of people wanted to be lawyers, for instance, but when they were told that they’d be getting (just) ten squishes an hour for it (and that probably

any special ‘status’ to the job would then disappear), they changed their minds, no they really didn’t want to study all those statutes and cases for four years. And generally speaking, no one wanted to do what they weren’t very good at, so it all worked out, people could do what they wanted.

There were some jobs that no one wanted to do. If the job needed to be done (“No one wants to do waste disposal”), then Alice figured out how many hours per year were needed to get the job done, and then divided that by the number of people in the land, and every one would have to spend that much time at that job during the year. So for the example mentioned, everyone had to spend four hours per year picking up garbage, or driving it to the site, or operating the disposal equipment. Oddly enough, the next year it worked out to be three hours.

And if the job didn’t need to be done (“No one wants to work in the electric toothbrush factory” “Do we need electric toothbrushes?” “No!”), then it just didn’t get done. Production of nuclear weapons came pretty much to a halt this way.

By and large, things worked out. People changed jobs whenever they finished with what they were doing or whenever they got tired of it. Which was nice. And since many changed by ‘trading’ with someone else, there was no problem with job training (they simply told each other what to do and how to do it—people seemed to learn more quickly than they used to) or with the overall balance (which was reached rather quickly).

There were many other things Alice had planned to do as King of the land, but she discovered that after this, none of the other things needed to be done. Somehow, when people were guaranteed a standard of living, which was neither less nor more than everyone else for the same amount of work, and when they spent their time and energy doing what they wanted, well, everyone lived happily ever after!



## The Wicked Stepmother

Rumour has it that I was cruel to my stepdaughter, kicked her out of the house, and tried to kill her. All because I was jealous of her beauty. As usual, rumour is somewhat exaggerated. And somewhat incorrect.

I did not try to kill her. (However in one case, I did send her away. But not because of the king's decreased attention to me, no, it was because of his increased attention to her—I was trying to protect her).

As for beauty (that is, sexual attractiveness), at my age she'd realize it doesn't last. And if that's all a woman has, well, when she loses that, she loses everything. An old man can keep his wealth; women don't have riches to keep. An old man can keep his title (king, duke, knight, nobleman, priest, minstrel, blacksmith, cobbler); women's titles (whore, madonna, or mother) go when menopause comes. An old man can be a sage; women do have knowledge, but no authority to use it (we become witches, not wise men). So, men have replacements for their sexual potency; women don't. So men remain powerful without sexuality; women don't.

Knowing all of this, I never put much store in sexual attractiveness. So no, I was not jealous of her beauty. If anything, I was jealous of her youth: she had more time to develop other resources, other reasons to be valued and respected.

And so yes, knowing all of this, I insulted her looks, I made fun of her, I was cruel to her: I discouraged her pursuit of beauty, hoping she would then pursue those other resources, those other reasons—those alternatives! Don't you see? To be feminine is to be beautiful; I thought if I denied the beauty, she'd have to redefine the feminine.

(For all of us to live happily ever after.)



## Greystrands

Once upon a time I had pretty little golden locks. Now all I have are grey strands. And as I was walking along one day with my cart full of all of my things—if you didn't take it with you, somebody would steal it—and I had a lot of things people would—well, they'd kill for my plastic bags, great big green ones with no tears at all, just a little one in the corner, still keeps you dry though don't you worry, and I've got a big long stick with a nail stuck in the end, one of the city workers fell asleep on the bench next to me one afternoon, you know those old geezers ready to retire that they put on the Parks Sanitation Crew, well that stick sure is good at sticking things, I can't reach down anymore, my back is falling apart, and you miss a lot of good stuff at the bottom of the bins if you can't just reach down and grab it, well, see, now I just poke in my stick, a few times, 'cause my eyes aren't so good these days, and there, I've got it. But do you know what people most want to grab off me? My little black book. That's why I keep it on my person, it's too precious. I have a list, all written down of all the places that give away their leftovers—good leftovers—and I've got a star beside the ones that do it without making you feel like a beggar.

What was I saying? Oh yes, I was walking along, feeling right smart in my new rubber boots—yesterday's find—a bit big but if I wear all my socks—and suddenly I smelled this delicious porridge. Now you have to understand that hot food is a real treat for most of us. How are we ever going to make ourselves a hot meal on the streets in our corners—plug in a hot plate to the nearest parking meter?

So I checked my list quick to see if this address was on it. (I forget easy,

that's why I've got them written down—it does no good to go the same place three times to ask when they said no the first time, they'll think you're being a pest. They don't realize how easy it is to just forget day to day where you've been. Why I hardly remember where I am sometimes). But no, these people weren't on the list, under the yes's or the no's. So I knocked on the door, politely, to ask if they could spare some of their nice hot porridge. No answer. Well, the door was open a bit, so I peeked in. No one there. But I saw the porridge steaming in bowls on the table. Brown sugar in a little dish even. Well I was hungry and so I confess I went straight to it. Serves me right, I burnt the whole roof of my mouth! Ooh, I yelled! Then I laughed! I haven't burnt my mouth since, well since I was a lot younger, but—eating pizza! Yes, that's it, the first slice from a box when it was just delivered... I tried the next bowl—too hot too, darn! But the smallest bowl was cool enough, so I ate it all without another thought. Then I felt awfully sleepy. Again when was the last time I ate so much I got tired? Well I headed for a comfy chair, but then I saw a bedroom—sure enough, there were beds! I mean—oh, this one is too hard—I knew they'd have beds, it's just I haven't slept—this one's too soft—in a bed—but this one is just right—since...

Delivered pizza! Can you believe I was once rich enough—can you believe I once had an address they could deliver it too? So what happened? How did I get from a little apartment on King and Third with flower pots on the balcony and a cat that knew its name and a cup of tea in the afternoons with “Cheers” reruns and Gus snoring in the lazyboy, his pipe fallen into his lap—Gus died. Gus who loved my golden locks, my prince charming for fifty-five years—died. So his pension stopped. And of course, as a homemaker for most of my life, and a part-time this and that, here and there, I had no pension of my own. The government—well, the government pension is based on how much you earned and how long you worked, so in my case it didn't come to much. The OAS and the GIS together came to about \$450 a month. Well, what do you think my rent was? \$400. That leaves \$50 a month for food and—and some of the pills I was on weren't covered, and there's extra billing every time I—Sure, we had savings, but that was running out. Of course I looked for a cheaper place to live, the shared accommodation column had

some pretty good possibilities, but no one wants to live with—There were a couple months I couldn't make rent—Boots got sick once and that cost, and I dropped my glasses and they broke and I had to buy another pair—I can't see at all without them—and I splurged, God knows why, and went to the dentist after all about that pain in my tooth, and, well I was evicted: I found myself out on the street with all of my things (what I had left—by this time it wasn't much, I had sold the radio, the tv of course, and my good set of dishes, things I didn't really need). And then I soon found out that if you have no fixed address, you get no fixed income. The OAS and GIS stopped. I woke up.

I mean these people came back into their house and found this smelly old lady asleep in one of their beds and they woke me up. As soon as I remembered where I was, I got all embarrassed. And then I felt the bed, oh my God, I didn't—I stumbled up, hoping they wouldn't notice, but they'd seen my cart and of course they'd called the hospital already. They apologized, I apologized, I tried just to be on my way, bundling up my big coat trying to hide the holes under the arms, thank you, I'm sorry, I—I couldn't get away, the attendants were there already—Is this a happy ending?



# Catherine

That you don't recognize me by name is but the first of my complaints about my tale. Oh you know me alright. I'm the main character—in a tale titled with the name of one of the men in the story. But what's in a name? A lot. Especially if it's a man's name. This man's name is the answer to the question upon which rests the fate of myself and my newborn child. So his name is very powerful, it is very important. My name apparently is not.

Nor is my life. For whether it is to be filled with joy and delight from being with my newborn, or empty with grief and loss from separation is to be decided by a mere guessing game.

Nor are my words important. I denied my father's boast. I told the King I most definitely could not spin gold out of straw. But he didn't believe me. Of course not. He chose instead to believe the words of an immature, egotistic, vain man. And I suffer the consequences.

The consequences. To pay for my father's ridiculous lie, I lose my sanity, my freedom, and my dignity for three nights—and almost my child, forever. (And one sentence—one sentence in the whole tale is devoted to that 'choice', that decision to give up my child in return for my life.)

Because I 'succeeded' on the third night, I was 'rewarded' with marriage to the King. Thus, for all intents and purposes, I also lost my life. Can you imagine what it is like to be married—legally bound to honour and obey until death, and socioeconomically bound with little option but to stay and make the best of it—to a man who didn't believe me, a man who locked me in a room for three nights, a man so greedy that he said three nights in a row he'd kill me unless I did as he wanted? And that was before he owned me.

But as the tale says, I am shrewd and clever. And I have learned the force of threat, and the importance of a name—especially if it is male. Proud fathers want very much to pass it on. But royal fathers—dear husband, aging Highness, what would happen to your precious lineage if my, your, only son were to suddenly—

Since I am not dead, and am living still . . .

# The King's Daughter

(the one with the frog)

You want to know what part of my story seems to get forgotten? No, besides my name. And besides the fact that I was blackmailed (in return for getting back my ball, he asked to be loved and befriended, to sit beside me at dinner, to eat off my plate, to drink out of my cup, and to sleep with me—all for a tiny little ball). Besides all that. You want to know what gets forgotten? The fact that I whipped him against the wall. Yes! Go read it and see for yourself!

Well, he went splat.      And that was that.



## Sleeping Beauty

“Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you a long time.” Give me a break! My hundred years were up! It wasn’t his kiss at all. That was just coincidence, an illusion of timing. Isn’t it always? Men rescuing women—it merely looks that way! More often than not, the damsel works through her distress long before the guy even arrives. But not surprisingly, they get—and take—all the credit. The whole idea of men bringing women to consciousness is ludicrous. Who initiated consciousness-raising groups? It’s more like our kiss brings them to life. Just ask Snow White. It’s womb envy, that’s all, desire and greed for power and control, over birth itself—it’s a creation myth. Waiting for my prince? Sorry. I was just waiting for my time, my sentence, to be up.

Restlessly waiting, I might add. I was getting pretty tired just lying there. Oh I know, that’s what women are supposed to do. We’re supposed to be quiet, we’re supposed to be patient, we’re supposed to be vulnerable. We’re supposed to be gentle, humble, meek, submissive, docile, good-tempered, self-sacrificing, dependent. We’re supposed to be good little girls: perfectly passive. And, of course, we’re supposed to be beautiful—another ‘passive’. Try as we may to improve our looks, generally either you are or you aren’t ‘beautiful’, there’s nothing you can do about it. There’s nothing you can do, period.<sup>1</sup> Well except sing, and dance, and play an instrument—my ‘gifts’.

And to make sure we are what we’re supposed to be, only good little girls get rewarded. But wait just a minute—rewarded? Yes. For a start, with attention. Good little girls don’t get ignored, they get taken seriously. Well, they get

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<sup>1</sup> What really bothers me is after a while (a hundred years?), you believe it. See, that’s what struck me most about the prince. He started through the impenetrable thicket “not doubting that he would succeed.” I envy that.<sup>3</sup>

taken. Then they get married. Marriage is a reward?<sup>2</sup> The wedding maybe (odd, that's all we ever see), but marriage? A husband? Well, the status—The status of Mrs.? And money—His money.

Listen, I'll tell you what the real reward is for being perfectly passive. Or shall I let the Goose Girl tell you? Or Felicia, Rapunzel, Rosette, Mayblossom? Or The Girl Without Hands, the sister of The Twelve Brothers, Bluebeard's wife? According to the stories, these women are rescued, and then glorified.

Not quite. Not by a long shot. Two were murdered by their husbands (one of them was burned to death); two of them died from their injuries and beatings, and another from starvation; one never did recover her mind from being locked up in the tower so long; and the other two are still helping each other recover their confidence and self-esteem, they were the ones who started up the shelter and crisis line.

No, being a good little girl does not a happy ending make. Just look at what happened to me!

You mean you thought—No! He was an undercover cop. He arrested me for soliciting! Said I was being “provocative, lying there like that, all beautiful, just waiting, teasing, seducing, inviting . . .” Yes, I explained to him.

But, well, seems if you're a woman, you don't have to do anything to be guilty.

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<sup>2</sup> I never could figure out whether Cinderella got the booby prize or was the booby prize.

<sup>3</sup> But if you read on, you see that “strangely enough a way seemed to open before him.” Strangely, my ass. Paths are always opening for men. Women not only have to wrangle our way through, we have to do it with our bare hands. My christening gifts did not include a machete.

# Thumb

Once upon a time, there was a tiny little person named Thumb. And that tiny little person was me. Most people thought it was unfortunate to be so small—but not me, I didn't mind a bit! There are several advantages to being small—I mean really small, like me.

Webweaving. Not everyone gets to learn straight from the horse's mouth—or rather, the spider's legs. I know all about cobwebs, orbwebs, and sheetwebs; I can tell you when to use a curled thread and when to use a crossed thread or a straight thread; I can describe the important qualities of the different grades of spidersilk; and I know all about radiant lines, spiral lines, parallel lines, and guy lines—in fact, I spend as much time designing as I do weaving. I have one intricate pattern that's very, very beautiful; if it proves to be functional as well, I'm going to enter it into next year's Spinneret festival.

Not only can I webweave, I can webwalk too. The Theridiidae taught me how to step along from one strand to another—like on a tightrope or a balance beam. It's kind of tricky with only one pair of legs, but if I fall, no problem: a web underneath catches me and bounces me about—like a trampoline. Sometimes I fall on purpose because it's so much fun!

What else can I do that big people can't? Well, I can explore the pond for hours in my leafboat. Or if I feel like it, I'll just drift about, lying in the sun. I take dance classes at the Centipede Studio. An ant is teaching me subterranean architecture. And birds take me for rides all the time—a swallow is like a glider, a sparrow is like a small plane, and a hummingbird is kind of like a helicopter.

I have to be careful about the wind (and the rain and the snow), but because I'm so small, I can fit almost anywhere, so I have lots of cozy hideaways.

All in all, it's not bad being a tiny little person named Thumb. I've been pretty happy just being me.

That is, until recently. A little while ago, people started getting very concerned about me—and very confused. I got concerned—and confused—too. You see, suddenly my sex was very important: everyone wanted to know if I was a girl or a boy, a man or a woman. So I thought and thought and thought and finally I came up with the reason—marriage! Suddenly my sex had become important because I was expected to get married! And I was expected to marry someone of the other sex! So! You see? They had to figure out what sex I was.

Well, now that I understood, I thought I knew what to do. I simply told them that I had no intention of getting married. I figured then my sex would become irrelevant and everyone would leave me alone. Not so! Some said 'Oh, that proves he's a man—he wants to sow his wild oats first!' Others said 'No, she's one of those stuck-up feminists—they all think they're too good to be a housewife and mother!' Then someone else said 'No, don't you see he's got no time for a wife and kids—he must be someone very important or very intelligent'. I told them none of it was true. But their curiosity grew into anger. 'You must be a lesbian then—and you hate men!' and 'You must be one of those faggots—you don't want to settle down and be responsible like a real man!' I turned away and tried to ignore them. 'If only he were bigger, we could see at a glance', I heard someone say as they finally left. 'Or she', someone added.

Things kept getting worse and worse. People kept bothering me with the most ridiculous strategies. Once a group of them came to ask me if I was pretty or not. I asked them why they wanted to know. They stuttered and mumbled, then one said 'If you say yes, then you're a girl!' 'And if I say no?' One laughed and said 'Well I'd change my mind about proposing!' Then one of them tried a slightly different approach: 'Is it important to you—to be pretty?' I said no. One immediately declared with victory, 'See—he's a man!' but at the same time another stated 'See, I tell you she's one of those lesbians, they don't care how they look!' They began shouting at each other then, and continued to badger me with questions—what was my complexion like, what

was the shape of my face—I finally asked them to leave. As they were doing so, I heard one say ‘She can’t be pretty, with a tongue like that’, and another, ‘Speaks his mind, reminds me of my husband, that man.’

Another group pestered my tailor. ‘What kind of clothes does she wear?’ ‘He orders trousers, doesn’t he, never dresses?’ They were told I always wore loose-fitting pants with pockets and loose-fitting tunic tops. The truth only served to irritate them. ‘She must not have a good figure, wants to hide it!’ ‘Typical man—baggy, frowsy clothes.’ ‘No, she asks for loose-fitting—don’t you see, only a woman would be attracted by the way loose garments drape and fold over the body.’ ‘Practical dressers, that’s us—you women can’t move, everything’s so tight.’ After a while, someone tried again: ‘What colours?’ My tailor told them. ‘Browns, blues, greens—’ ‘Ah-see!’ ‘—reds, oranges, pinks.’ ‘No—see!’

One time, someone asked what I did for a living. I told them about a few jobs I’d had: feather stylist at a bird salon; assistant at a watch repair shop; social worker for an exterminator business (a humanitarian approach—far superior to fumigating—I simply helped the unwanted tenants relocate); official at the grasshoppers’ high jumping meet. Then I told them what I hoped to be one day: a chief microsurgeon or a pioneer in *petit-pointe*. My answers were clearly not too helpful. They asked then what I did in my spare time. I told them about my dance lessons and my architecture lessons. I told them about exploring the pond and basking in the sun. They went away more frustrated than ever.

Unfortunately, there were a few who didn’t stop at asking. They started telling. Telling me what I should and shouldn’t do. Those who had decided that I was a woman reprimanded me for being overly ambitious, outspoken, bold, arrogant, mixed-up, immature, and irresponsible. Some, however, complimented me on some of the webs I’d woven and encouraged me in my dance lessons. Those who had decided that I was a man accused me of being an underachiever, lazy, a sissy, a coward, mixed-up, immature, and irresponsible. A few, though, had good words to say about my drive and independence, and one even offered to pay for my first year at medical school.

Over the next few months, the people became more and more divided in their opinions. Quite a rivalry developed between those who thought I was a

man and those who thought I was a woman. Many let me know that I was responsible for splitting the town into two warring factions

One day, I found that someone had left a microfilm of the local newspaper for me. That day's issue featured two stories, written by two of the townspeople: one was called "Thumbelina" and the other was called "Tom Thumb". I read them both. They were amazing.

The first one was about a tiny little girl. Who was very pretty. (This was mentioned eleven times.) She had a soft and sweet voice. The second one was about a tiny little boy. Who was very clever. He had sharp and sparkling eyes. Thumbelina was kidnapped twice—first by a toad and later by a cockchafer. Tom Thumb was never taken against his will—he allows himself to be sold so his poor father can get lots of money. The first time, Thumbelina is freed by fish, and the second time, she was eventually abandoned (because all of the other cockchafers thought she was ugly). She sat and cried a lot. Tom Thumb, on the other hand, escapes on his own. Again and again, from several situations. All escapes reveal his cleverness, and, interestingly enough, they all involve his making a noise, his shouting, his crying out (instead of just crying). Eventually a mouse takes Thumbelina in (she didn't go looking for the mouse; she was "wandering" and "all at once came across" the mouse's door), and he arranges her salvation through marriage to a rich mole. Thumbelina didn't like the mole at all, so a swallow (whom she had nursed back to life earlier) offered to take her away instead, but she declined—the mouse would be sad if she left, she said. But just as the marriage was about to take place, the swallow reappeared and Thumbelina accepted his rescue this time. The swallow takes her to a tiny king; he proposed, she accepted, and they lived happily ever after. Tom Thumb also lives happily ever after, having eventually found his way home.

When I had finished reading the stories, I realized how very serious the situation had become. The entire town had developed a split personality: not quite a good-bad split, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but rather a male-female split. There was clearly a great deal of unhealthy repression going on. Which resulted in grotesque distortions: the only time Thumbelina shows any resourcefulness or intelligence is when she hitched her lily pad to a butterfly,

and the only time she wasn't passive was at the very beginning when she passed the time rowing a tulip petal around in a bowl; Tom Thumb shows no remorse at all at having a cow and a wolf killed for his sake (when the cockchafer carries Thumbelina from the lily pad, she worries about whether the butterfly will starve or manage to free himself), and the closest he comes to kindness, gentleness, compassion—indeed, any kind of love—is the initial bargain he consents to, which gives his father money. The polarities were disturbing, to say the least.

But what could I do?

Since we are not dead, and are living still . . .



## Note to Reader

When the whole book was done, I came across this:

[Pasiphae, condemned to death for having had intercourse with a bull and having given birth to the monster Minotaur, speaks in her own defence]

“If I were to deny the fact you would never believe me; it is clear enough. Now if I had prostituted my body in clandestine love to a man, you could have rightly said I was a whore. But as things are, it was a god who drove me mad; I am sorry, but it was not my fault. It makes no sense; what is it about the bull that could have stirred up my feelings with such a shameful passion? Did he look so splendid in his robes? Did his auburn hair and his eyes flash brilliantly? Was it his dark beard? It can hardly have been the symmetry of his form. This is the love for which I got into the skin and went on all fours; and this makes Minos angry! I could hardly wish to make this husband the father of children; why was I afflicted with this madness? It was *Minos*' evil genius who afflicted me with his curse; the one human being who bears all the guilt is *Minos*! It was he who broke the promise he had made to sacrifice the bull that came as a portent to the sea god. It was for *this* that Poseidon's vengeance came upon you, and it is on me that it descended! And then you cry aloud and call all the gods to witness, when the doer of the act that put me to shame is yourself! I who gave birth to the creature have done no

harm; I kept secret the godsent affliction of the curse. It is you who publish to all your wife's disgrace, handsome as it is and proper to display, as though you had no part in it, maddest of madmen! You are my ruin, because the crime is yours; you are the cause of my affliction! Well, if you wish to drown me, drown me! You are expert in bloody deeds and murder. Or if you lust to eat my flesh, then eat it, feed to your heart's content! I shall perish free and guiltless, for a crime for which *you* are guilty!" (Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982)

I was startled—I might've written that! And I was delighted—it was dated *mid-5th century BCE!* (So perhaps these pieces of mine aren't as fictional as I think . . .)

SYNOPSIS  
AND  
REFERENCES



# I. EPISTLES

All of the women in this section (well, all except one—Lilith comes from other Jewish mythology) are from *The Bible*, a book central to Judaeo-Christianity, the main religious tradition of ‘western civilization’. In the following, I summarize the story as told in *The Bible*, then give the relevant Biblical references, as well as references for material which contradicts or extends or questions the story, some of which I used when writing the pieces.

All references to *The Bible* are to *The Holy Bible, King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1977.

## I am Abel

Cain and Abel are the sons of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman): “Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground.” They each made a sacrifice to God, “And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect”. This made Cain angry, so he killed his brother Abel. God then punished Cain with a curse (“when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength”) and set a mark on his forehead (so no one would kill him). Cain then “went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden”.

Genesis 4.

Morgan, Elaine. *The Descent of Woman*. New York: Bantam, 1973. 159-190 (for some of the ideas about women and the origin of agriculture).

## I am Cain's Wife

Cain did have a wife—the rest is conjecture.

Genesis 4.

## I am the certain woman

During a battle, a certain woman “cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech’s head, and all to brake his skull”. His response is as presented in the opening lines.

Judges 9:50-59.

Dyer, Gwynne. *War*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985. 112, 193 (for the idea and information in footnote 1).

## I am Delilah

The events of the first part of this story are as I have presented them: Samson’s demand of his parents for a wife, his giving her away, his killing the thirty men, the foxes, the subsequent slaughter, his betrayal by his own people, his escape, the subsequent slaughter.

The story continues in Gaza, where Samson falls in love with Delilah, who has been offered 1,100 silver pieces by the Philistines to entice him into telling her where his strength lies. After several requests for such information, and several lies, Samson tells her “If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me.” So, “she made him sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head.” He could not escape this time; the Philistines put out his eyes and imprisoned him.

“And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport,” so he was brought out for the feast. Then Samson “called unto the Lord” for strength, to avenge the Philistines for the loss of his sight, and he grabbed the pillars of the house and heaved, destroying the house, 3,000 Philistines, and himself.

Judges 13-16.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976 (for the view of Delilah as a spy).

## I am Eshta

A Levite man “took to him a concubine” from Bethlehem-Judah; she “played the whore against him,” left, and went to her father’s house; four months later, her husband (the Levite) went after her; he was welcomed by the woman’s father, and given hospitality; several times the man wanted to leave, but the father urged him to stay another night; eventually he and the woman left, to return to his house in Ephraim.

On the way, they passed through Gibeah, and an old man offered them lodging overnight (when no one else would). After they had eaten, “certain sons of Belial beat the house round about, and beat at the door” demanding to see the Levite. The old man refused, offering instead his daughter and the concubine: “Do with them what seemeth good unto you; but unto this man do not so vile a thing.” The men took the concubine, “knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning.” When the Levite rose and left to go on his way, he found the concubine fallen at the door, “her hands . . . upon the threshold.”

He took her dead body back home with him, cut it into twelve pieces, and “sent her into all the coasts of Israel.” At a general meeting, the people of Israel asked how it had happened. He replied that the men of Gibeah rose against him, and “thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.” The people of Israel asked the Lord whether or not they should declare war on the Benjamites (the sons of Belial), at Gibeah. The Lord advised yes, saying “Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand.”

In the ensuing war, all of the women and most of the men of Gibeah were killed. Fearing the extinction of the tribe, without women, the Hebrew elders arranged for the remaining Benjamites to catch and rape 400 young virgins from the neighbouring town of Shiloh.

Judges 19-20.

Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977. 21 (for calling my attention to Eshta).

## I am Eve

There are two versions in The Bible of Eve’s origin. One (chapter one) describes her creation contemporaneously with Adam, and the other (chapter two) describes that Adam was created first and Eve later. In any case, God (the creator of everything) commanded them/him not to eat from a certain tree (called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”); if they even touched it, they would die. Eve, encouraged/tempted by

a serpent, does eat the forbidden fruit; she offers some to Adam, which he accepts. God then throws them out of the garden of Eden (paradise), cursing them with a life of labour.

Many Christian sects believe that everyone (being descendent from Adam and Eve) is born with that original sin, and only baptism (a special rite) can erase it; people who are not baptised, who remain in a state of original sin, will go to Hell (a place of eternal pain/punishment) when they die, or at least to Limbo (a place of permanent 'suspension'); the others have a chance of going to Heaven (a place of eternal happiness/reward).

Genesis 1-3.

## I am Hagar

Hagar is Sarah's handmaid. The covenant referred to at the end of "I am Hagar" is described in Genesis: "And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee"; "And I will give unto the . . . all the land of Canaan . . ."; "This is my covenant . . . between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised"; "it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you".

Genesis 6-7, 17.

Davis, Elizabeth Gould. *The First Sex*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979. 154-157.

## I am Judith

The basic story of Holofernes and Judith is as presented in the first two paragraphs.

Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. 328 (for drawing my attention to Judith).

Fischer, James A. *God Said: Let there be Woman—A Study of Biblical Women*. New York: Alba House, 1979. 8-11.

## I am Lilith

Lilith was the "first woman in the garden of Eden: because [she] stole Adam's sperms and made demons with it, she was exiled from the garden and from living memory."

Unfortunately all I have is this quote—and no record of its source. However, long after I'd written this piece, I managed to track down one mention of Lilith “To banish his loneliness, Lilith was first given to Adam as wife . . . But she remained with him only a short time, because she insisted upon enjoying full equality with her husband” (from Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909, vol. 3, p. 65).

## I am Mary

According to Christian mythology, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to save us by dying for our sins. Mary (a virgin, wife of Joseph) was chosen to be the mother, and impregnation occurred without sexual intercourse—thus the ‘virgin birth’. (The ‘Immaculate Conception’ is usually thought to refer to this conception of Christ, but actually it refers to the conception of Mary—see the first footnote.) This remarkable event led to suspicion on Joseph’s part; at that time, a man could kill his wife for adultery. However, an angel came to explain the miracle to Joseph, and all was well.

The figure of Mary (the ‘BVM’—Blessed Virgin Mary) is most prominent in the Roman Catholic sect of Christianity. She is ‘celebrated’ in the five ‘Joyful Mysteries’, which are often depicted in pictures: the Annunciation (when she is told she will be the mother of Jesus, Son of God), the Visitation (she visits a friend with the news), the Birth of Jesus (in a stable at Bethlehem), the Presentation (she presents Jesus in the temple), and the Finding in the Temple (when Jesus is ‘lost’, she finds him there). She is also ‘allotted’ two of the five ‘Glorious Mysteries’: the Assumption (she dies and is carried to heaven by angels) and the Crowning of Mary (she is crowned Queen, which gives rise to her power of intervention).

The bit about Jesus creating toys and turning children into goats is documented (see the Arabic Gospels, below); so is Mary’s ‘teletransportation’ feat (but unfortunately I can’t track down the source of my notes for this one) and her appearances at Lourdes and Fatima (see the encyclopedia citations, below).

A very common prayer is the ‘Hail Mary’: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” It is often given as penance (that is, one must say so many ‘Hail Marys’ to absolve oneself of one’s sins) and it is a major part of the Rosary (a string of beads one passes through one’s fingers, saying a certain prayer at each bead).

John 2:4.

Luke 1:28, 1:30, 2:22.

Mark 3:31-35.

Matthew 1:19.

- The Arabic Gospel, The Apocryphal New Testament.* tr. Montague Rhodes James. London: Oxford University Press, 1966. 68.
- Protoevangelium of James, The Apocryphal New Testament.* 39-49, 74.
- The Acts of John, The Apocryphal New Testament.* 242-243.
- The Acts of Peter, The Apocryphal New Testament.* 313.
- The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia,* ed. William Bridgwater, New York: The Viking Press, 1953. 1:412; 2:736.

## I am Mary

I started from scratch with this one—it's pure conjecture. Well, almost: there is a Mary, of Bethany, mentioned in The Bible; she and Jesus do know each other, and she values being in his presence (whereas her sister, Martha, would rather do the dishes—which makes me think now that I should've done a piece on Martha instead!).

The gospels mentioned in the first and sixth footnotes are real (see below); and so is Bouts' painting (i.e., it is a last supper scene, and there is a woman in it beside Christ).

About two years after I wrote this, I read (in Boulding, referring to Eckenstein) that the Gnostic version of the Gospels lists eight men and four women as disciples (the women are Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen, Martha, and Salome).

John 1:40-45.

Luke 6:13-16, 7:36-56, 22:10-12, 24:10.

Mark 3:16-19, 14:13-15, 16:1.

Matthew 10:1-4.

*Gospel of Ebionites, The Apocryphal New Testament.* tr. Montague Rhodes James. London: Oxford University Press, 1966. 9.

*Secret Gospel of Mark, The Other Gospels,* ed. Ron Cameron. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982. 69.

*Gospel of Philip, The Nag Hammadi Library, The Gnostic Society Library.* tr. Wesley W. Isenberg. <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/naghamm/gop.html>

*Gospel of Thomas, The Other Gospels.* 37.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time.* Colorado: Westview Press, 1976. 356.

Bouts, Dirk. *The Last Supper* (see Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*, sixth edition, revised by Horst de la Croix and Richard G. Tansey, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975, p. 547)

Eckenstein, Lina. *The Women of Early Christianity.* Faith Press, 1935. 35-41.

Davis, Elizabeth Gould. *The First Sex.* Middlesex: Penguin, 1979. 272 (for the reference to the incorrect science textbook).

## I am Mary

Mary Magdalen is known as a ‘repentant and reformed prostitute’. The bit about reading and writing (see also “I am Mary, of Bethany”) is pure conjecture.

John 8:1-11, 12:1-8, 11:2, 20:14-18.

Luke 8:1-2, 7:36-50, 24:11.

Mark 14:3-9, 16:9, 16:11-14.

Matthew 26:6-13.

*Gospel of Philip, The Nag Hammadi Library, The Gnostic Society Library.* tr. Wesley

W. Isenberg. <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/naghamm/gop.html>

Rice, Tim. *Jesus Christ Superstar*. New York: Decca Records, 1970.

## I am Noah's Wife

Displeased with the behaviour of man, God decided to destroy his creation with a flood. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” so God instructed him to build an ark, for himself, his sons, his wife, his sons’ wives, and two (male and female) of “every living thing”, in order that they might survive the flood. They did, and God established a covenant with Noah “and every living creature . . .” promising never to do it again.

Genesis 6-9.

## I am the Queen of Sheba

The Queen of Sheba, hearing of “the fame of [King] Solomon concerning the name of the Lord,” went to visit him. She was impressed with his wisdom and prosperity, they exchanged gifts, and she returned to her country.

1 Kings 4-10.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. 104-105 (for the distinction between sacrificing the person and sacrificing the principle, used in footnote 2).

## I am Ruth

At the encouragement of her mother-in-law (Naomi), Ruth dressed in her finest clothes and lay at the feet of Boaz one night. (Naomi and Ruth were poor widows; Boaz was a rich man; Naomi was trying to arrange a marriage between Ruth and Boaz). By law, the nearest next-of-kin had first right to marry Ruth, and Boaz was not the nearest next-of-kin. However, Naomi had inherited a piece of land from her husband, and whoever bought the land, bought Ruth as well — Boaz bought the land.

Ruth 3-4.

## I am Satan

I have been trying to sort out my understanding of Satan and angels, specifically, trying to sort out what is from The Bible, what is from Roman Catholicism (a sect of Christianity which has doctrine additional to The Bible), and what is from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Milton is a 17th century Anglican-Puritan, and *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem recounting Satan's rebellion against God and the story of Adam and Eve and is part of the canon for literature students). It is difficult; suffice it to say that the basis for this piece was as follows.

God created angels (though there is no account of this in Genesis) to be his assistants/messengers; they are divine beings and of various ranks (e.g., archangels, seraphim, cherubim). One of the angels, Satan, rose up, and there was a fight: Satan and his followers against Michael and his followers (God was on Michael's side—or vice versa). Satan lost and was sent to Hell, to burn forever (I guess God had created Hell, but again, I can find no account of it in The Bible). And it is Satan (a.k.a. Lucifer, a.k.a. the Devil) who tempts humankind to evil (he was the serpent in the garden of Eden—temporarily escaped from Hell, I presume).

*Secret Book of John, The Other Bible*, ed. Willis Barnstone. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. 52.

*Gospel of Philip, The Nag Hammadi Library, The Gnostic Society Library*. tr. Wesley W. Isenberg. <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/naghamm/gop.html>

*Gospel of Truth, The Other Bible*. 287.

Barnstone, Willis, ed. *The Other Bible* (for the reference to the Hermes Trismegistus tradition in footnote 4)

de Limbourg, Jean. *Très Riches Heures*. New York: Abrams, 1984 (for reference to “The Fall of Man”).

## I am Thecla

The story of Thecla can be found, as presented in the fourth paragraph, in the Acts of Paul (which I refer to as the Acts of Paul and Thecla), including the bit about the women tossing flowers into the stadium (but the bit about the flower in her hair is something I made up).

The endeavours of the various women described in the third paragraph were mentioned in Stanton and Fischer (see below).

According to Boulding, to choose to be a follower of Christ, then, was to choose to be virginal and independent—seen as a refusal to accept the ‘proper duties of women’; this helps explain the extreme measures described in the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

*Acts of Paul, The Apocryphal New Testament.* tr. Montague Rhodes James. London: Oxford University Press, 1966. 272-281.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time.* Colorado: Westview Press, 1976.

Fischer, James A. *God Said: Let there be Woman—A Study of Biblical Women.* New York: Alba House, 1979

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady and the Revising Committee, *The Woman’s Bible.* rpt. 1898. Seattle: Coalition on Women and Religion, 1984. II:137, 152, 153.

## I am Vashti

The story itself is as presented in “I am Vashti”—with the addition of Vashti’s being let go from her position of queen, and with the exception of Amartia (I made her up). Oh, and Bertha. (I made her up too.)

Esther 1.

## I am Zipporah

Moses was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (where they were being persecuted), to a ‘promised land’. In the third month of their journey (their ‘exodus’), Moses was called to the top of Mount Sinai to receive ten tenets of moral law. These ‘Ten Commandments’ have since become a basis for Christianity.

Exodus 19-20.



## II. MYTHS

This section draws predominantly on Greek and Roman myths. Information about the myths was derived mainly from the following two books:

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology London: The New England Library Limited*, 1969.

Evans, Ivor H. ed. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

### Acristus

This King of Argos had a daughter but no son. Very troubled by this, he travelled to Delphi to ask for a son; he was told he would never father a son, but his daughter would bear a male child who would kill him.

### Adonis

Adonis was very favoured by the Greek women—indeed Persephone and Aphrodite, both insistent in their love for him, shared him. One day while hunting, he wounded a boar—the boar gored him and he bled to death.

### Amphion

Amphion was scorned by his brother, Zethus (a man who had great physical prowess), because he dedicated his life to art rather than to athletics.

## Ares

Ares was the god of war, a ruthless, murderous god. When he was injured during the Trojan War, he went immediately to Zeus to complain of the violence.

## Artemis

Otus and Ephialtes, brothers and sons of Poseidon, decided one day that each should seize the woman he loved. So the two of them began to track down Artemis, who was Ephialtes' choice. Eventually they found her on the shore, and followed her across the sea, into a forest. She turned into a hind and they decided to pursue it 'instead'; they split up to continue their chase, soon 'circling' her in a clearing. When they had both let loose their javelins, she leapt out of the way and they ended up killing each other.

## Atalanta

Atalanta was abandoned at birth on a mountainside and raised by a bear. She took part in the famous Calydonian boar hunt: many of the men resented her presence, and they were positively enraged when she won the prize. She wanted to sail with the Argonauts but it's not certain that she was indeed part of that quest. She did not want to marry, and as a way of declining the many proposals, she said she would marry only the man who could beat her in a footrace; one suitor started his race with golden apples which he tossed along the way—she stopped to pick them up and thus lost the race.

## Athena

Orestes avenged his father's death (Agamemnon) by killing his murderer (Clytemnestra, Orestes' mother), then spent years in guilt and suffering seeking atonement and absolution. Eventually he came before Athena for judgement. Contrary to custom, which demanded justice by his death, she decided he was to be forgiven. She persuaded the Furies (who were pursuing him to enact this justice) and with that new law of mercy, they became instead the Eumenides (the Kindly Ones).

## Bellerophon

Bellerophon was unjustly accused of rape by Anetia, whose husband, Proteus, sent him on a journey sure to end in his death.

## Chiron

Many gods and kings took their children to Chiron for safe and good upbringing.

## Chryseis and Briseis

Agamemnon and Achilles were both members of the Greek army that fought the Trojan War (a war begun over a woman, Helen). A quarrel began about Chryseis, who had been carried off by the Greeks and given to Agamemnon. Chryseis' father begged for her release but Agamemnon refused. Because this angered the gods (Chryseis' father was a priest of Apollo), the army chiefs, led by Achilles, persuaded Agamemnon to change his mind. He did so, saying 'but if I lose her who was my prize of honour, I will have another in her stead'. He then sent two of his men to Achilles' tent to get his prize, a woman named Briseis. Achilles allowed them to take her, but swore he would have revenge.

## Circe

Circe lived alone on an island, and turned every man who approached her into a beast; notorious was the band of men sent by Odysseus—they were turned into pigs.

## Clytie

Clytie was a young woman in love with the Sun god. She would sit outside all day and watch him. Eventually she turned into a sunflower.

## Daedalus

Daedalus was a great inventor, asked by King Minos to build a labyrinth in which the Minotaur would live—and in which seven young men and seven young women

from Athens would be left to die each year, unable to find their way out. One year Daedalus helped the youths escape; for this he was punished by the King, who left him and his son in the labyrinth of his own making. They escaped, using wings Daedalus created, but Icarus (his son) flew too near the sun, the wax of the wings melted, and he fell to his death.

The reference to the Japanese is a reference to Hiroshima: it is estimated that initially 70,000 were killed and 70,000 injured; subsequently (and consequently) another 140,000 have died.

## The Danaids

The Danaids were fifty sisters who were to be married to their fifty cousins. The women opposed the marriages but were forced into them; on their wedding night, each of them (except one) killed her husband; they were doomed in Hades to fetch water from a river using sieves—an endless (and impossible) task.

## Daphne

Daphne was an independent woods-lover who was not at all interested in men—mortal or otherwise. This distressed her father, Peneus the river god, who very much wanted a grandson. One day Apollo saw her, wanted her, and pursued her through the forest. Just before she reached her father's river and safety, she was turned into a laurel tree. Apollo declared then 'at least you shall be my tree—with your leaves my victors shall wreath their brows'.

## Dido

Dido was the founder and ruler of Carthage. Aeneas got shipwrecked on her land and they became lovers. Eventually Aeneas left to found his own city. Dido then committed suicide.

## Eurydice

A few hours after Orpheus and Eurydice were married, she died (while she was walking through a meadow with her bridesmaids, a viper stung her). Heartbroken, Orpheus went to the Under-world to ask if he could have her back for a year.

## Gaia

Gaia is the greek goddess, Mother Earth, believed to be the Creator.

## Galatea

Pygmalion was a sculptor who detested 'the faults beyond measure which nature had given to women' and therefore resolved never to marry. In spite of or because of his attitude, he sculpted a statue of 'the perfect woman'. He grew to love it and began to kiss and caress it, dress it, bring it gifts, and put it to bed at night. Impressed with the strength of his love, Venus made the beautiful statue come alive; he named it Galatea.

## The Gorgons

The Gorgons were three sisters (Medusa was one of them) who were monsters with 'snaky hair, most horrible'; whoever looked at them turned instantly to stone.

## Hyacinth

Apollo and his best friend, Hyacinth, were engaged in a friendly contest to see who could throw the discus farther. Apollo's throw hit Hyacinth in the forehead and killed him.

## Hylas

Hylas was Hercules' young armour-bearer; they were very close. At the beginning of the Argonauts' voyage, Hylas disappeared, drawn under water by a nymph. Hercules dove in, desperately trying to find and rescue him. He refused to give up, and did not return to the ship—which eventually had to sail on without him.

## Iphigenia

On the way to fight the Trojan War, Agamemnon and his ship ran into some strong opposing winds. He was told by a soothsayer that if he offered up his daughter, Iphigenia, the winds would cease. So he sent for her, with the lie that he had arranged

a marriage for her with one of his greatest chieftains. She arrived and was carried to the altar not to be married but to be killed.

Another version tells that at the last moment, Artemis substituted a deer and Iphigenia was carried off to Taurus, a country whose people sacrificed Greeks to the goddess. There she was made priestess of the temple and her duties were to consecrate and deliver any Greek found in Taurus to those who would conduct the sacrifice. It was a task she did not enjoy and she wondered whether a goddess would command such sacrificial murder. One day she talked to two victims-to-be, planned their escape, and discovered that one was her brother, Orestes; all three of them managed to leave the country safely.

### Ismene

When her sister, Antigone, sought her assistance to bury their brother (an act forbidden by law because he had fought against the city), Ismene refused. So Antigone did it herself, risking a death sentence. When Antigone was caught, Ismene regretted her earlier refusal and tried to stand with her sister. But Antigone declared that she alone was responsible; she was led to heroic death and Ismene disappeared from further mythological accounts.

### Jason

A certain King of Greece had his kingdom taken away by his nephew, Pelias. So his son, Jason, was secretly sent to a place for safety, so that when he was grown, he could return and reclaim the kingdom that was rightfully his.

When Jason came to reclaim the kingdom that was 'rightfully' his (it had been taken away by his father's nephew, Pelias), Pelias agreed to give it back only after Jason found and brought back the Golden Fleece, a task he believed no one could attempt and stay alive. Jason accepted the conditions, and got a magnificent crew together for the quest. Since they sailed on the ship Argo, they became known as the Argonauts. Atalanta requested permission to join the crew.

### Macha

According to Celtic legend (Ireland), Macha was forced to race against a team of horses despite being pregnant; she won, then died giving birth to twins. At her death, she imposed a curse on the warriors of Ulster that incapacitated them for nine genera-

tions: whenever they attempted to fight, they were stricken with childbirth pains.

## Menelaus

Helen, reputed to be the fairest woman in the world, had many suitors from rich and powerful families. Her father (Tyndareus, King of Greece) eventually chose Menelaus to be her husband. While Paris (Prince of Troy) was a guest in their home, Menelaus returned one day to find both him and Helen gone. Thus began the great Trojan War. (Thanks to Gwynne Dyer, author of *War*, for the idea in the last stanza.)

## The Muses

The Nine Muses (daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne) have been popularized as sources of inspiration to artists. Thalia is the muse of comedy, Melpomene of tragedy, Clio of history, Urania of astronomy, Terpsichore of dance, Calliope of epic poetry, Erato of love poetry, Polyhymnia of songs to the gods, and Euterpe of lyric poetry.

## Narcissus

Narcissus was a man who fell in love with his own appearance—he spent all of his time gazing at his reflection in a pool of water.

## Omphale

Omphale was the queen of Lydia—she chose Hercules as her slave and sex object. Between sexual sessions, she sent him out on what became known as ‘the twelve labours’ (which included killing the lion of Nemea, killing the nine-headed Hydra, cleaning out the Augean stables, and picking up the droppings of the Stymphalian birds) (from Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex*).

Regarding the reference to ‘no-names’, ‘Hercules’ (a version of ‘Heracles’) is as anonymous as ‘Mrs. Bailey’: son of Hera, like wife of Bailey.

## Pandora

As a punishment for the possession of fire, Zeus ordered that a beautiful woman be made and given to mankind—she was named Pandora, ‘the gift of all’. Each of the gods had given her some quality that would prove ruinous to man. In one version, these ‘gifts’ were her incredible beauty, goodness, and youthful shy demeanour, which alone destroyed man for their power to distract and delight. In another version, the gods put the ‘gifts’ in a box and forbid her to open it.

## Penelope

Penelope was the wife of Odysseus, a man who took twenty years to return from the Trojan War. (He was drafted after a failed attempt to ‘plead’ insanity—his son was tossed into the path of his plough, he quickly averted, thus proving soundness of mind.) Since his absence was so lengthy, and since she was very beautiful, very rich, and very powerful, Penelope had many suitors. Still deeply in love with Odysseus, she stalled them by saying she would not remarry until she had finished weaving a funeral shroud for her aged father-in-law, Laertes. Every day she would weave and every night she would unravel the day’s work. Eventually Odysseus returned. Enraged at the insistent suitors, he prepared a banquet for them, locked them inside the hall without their weapons, then one by one he killed them.

## Penthesilea

She was queen of the Amazons—strong, independent, and seldom mentioned in books about myths.

## Persephone

Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, who then took her to live with him in the Underworld. Her mother, Demeter (goddess of the corn), mourned greatly for her and the earth became barren. Appalled at the possibilities, Zeus sent Hermes to bring Persephone back. Before allowing her to leave, Hades made her eat a pomegranate seed—apparently that would make her return to him. When Demeter found out about the pomegranate, she realized she could not keep her daughter with her. Fearing again the

possible consequences, Zeus sent a messenger to make a bargain

Persephone would have to return to the Underworld, but only for four months of every year.

### Philomel

Tereus, a son of Ares, raped Philomel. When she threatened to expose his crime, he cut out her tongue. She eventually told her story to her sister (who was his wife) by weaving a tapestry. They both escaped from his household, but he pursued them, and just as he was about to kill them, Philomel was turned into a swallow, and her sister into a nightingale.

### Poseidon

In an election for ruler of Athens, all of the women voted for Athena and all of the men for Poseidon, but since there was one more woman than there were men, Athena won. Poseidon then flooded the land and the men took the vote away from the women.

### Prometheus

Prometheus ('forethought'), son of Zeus, stole fire from the gods to give to mankind [sic]. As a punishment, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock, and every day an eagle came to eat out his liver.

### Psyche

Psyche was so beautiful no man wanted to marry her. Distraught, her father sought advice from the gods, and was told she must be abandoned on a hill and her destined husband would come to her. So, instructions were followed. She was transported from the hill to a beautiful mansion where she amused herself during the day; and every night her husband came, only to disappear by morning. He had told her she must never try to see him, but one night she decided to look—a drop of wax from her candle fell onto his shoulder, he woke, was indignant at her lack of trust, and left.

## The Sirens

The sirens were famous for their singing which was so beautiful that no man could hear it and continue his course; many a man was drawn to their island in this way, forgetting all else and eventually dying.

## Sisyphus

One day Sisyphus saw Zeus carry off a young woman. Shortly after, Asopus came to tell Sisyphus that his daughter, Aegina, had been kidnapped. Sisyphus told Asopus what he had seen. This of course angered Zeus, who punished Sisyphus by sending him to Hades, where he had to roll an enormous rock up a steep hill—as soon as he reached the top, the rock rolled back down and he had to start all over.

## Thetis

Thetis, mother of Achilles, didn't want her son to be drafted, so she dressed him like a woman and sent him to the court of Lycomedes where he would mix with the maidens.

### III. LETTERS

As mentioned in the introductory note, although all of these letters are fictional, the people writing them and (with the exception of “The Ride” and “The Stone”) the people written to are real; the relationship between the two is, however, fictional (and in some cases, pure fantasy).

#### The Dialogue

There seems to be some controversy over the status of women in 4th century BCE Athens. French (p. 144), footnoting Chicago (p. 123), describes women on a par with slaves, a state of affairs which required women to disguise themselves as men in order to attend school. An item in Lefkowitz—“two of Plato’s women disciples were said to have worn men’s clothing” (Diog. Laert. 3.46)—seems to support this, and many other fragments in Lefkowitz seem to me to reveal an attitude of misogyny and a reality of women as second class citizens. But Davis (p. 186-194) and Boulding (p. 258-265) say this view is inaccurate, and they describe classical Greece as a free state: women could and did hold property, have the right to unilateral divorce, contest and succeed in courts, carry on a business, and attend schools (undisguised).

I wrote “The Dialogue” to take place in 359 BCE—Plato would be around 68, Aristotle 25, Arete 11. Also, some kind of upheaval involving Macedonia was imminent at that time.

The opening discussion between Axiothea and Lasthenia concerning justice stems from Book I of Plato’s Republic in which he posits the following situation: “Suppose that a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him?”

Of interest: after I had finished the piece, I read (in Carroll) that Axiothea had become a teacher of philosophy and that “her reputation has suffered from the association of her name with that of Lasthenia” (p. 312) who, he goes on to suggest, became ‘promiscuous’ with the male students (including Speusippus), but ‘nevertheless’ “possessed some reputation as a philosopher” (p. 312).

Axiothea (4th Century BCE)—a Philasian, student of Plato; Plato did indeed praise Axiothea as described (French p. 144, footnoting Chicago p. 123), but as indicated below, it's unclear whether or not he knew she was a woman (even if she was disguised, he might've known)

Lasthenia (4th Century BCE)—a Mantinean from Arcadia, student of Plato

Aglaonice (5th Century BCE)—astronomer, astrologer

Arete (370-340 BCE)—head of a school in Cyrene with many distinguished students, a prolific writer (40 works attributed to her include pieces on philosophy, agriculture, and history), daughter and disciple of Aristippus of Cyrene

Arignote (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Theano and Pythagoras

Aristoclea a.k.a. Theoclea a.k.a. Themistoclea (6th Century BCE)—head of priesthood at Delphi, Pythagoras' sister, taught Pythagoras

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)—studied at Plato's Academy from 367 to its closing (Plato's death) in 347; in 334 he opened his own school, the Lyceum. The line ascribed to Aristotle in "The Dialogue" ("the female is, as it were, a mutilated male") is from his *De Generatione Animalium*. The other ideas ascribed to him (formal logic, the three types of soul, happiness as the aim of all human action, the emphasis on empirical data) are indeed his.

Aspasia (470-410 BCE)—taught Socrates rhetoric and philosophy

Damo (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Pythagoras

Demosthenes (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, orator

Diotima (5th Century BCE)—taught Socrates social philosophy and philosophy of love

Elpinice (5th Century BCE)—intellectual

Lycurgus (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, orator; I chose to have Axiothea suggest Lycurgus as Plato's successor only because I was sure he was one of Plato's students at the time, but my choice became ironic as I later read that Lycurgus "wanted to bring the women under his laws"—they resisted and he gave up (Lefkowitz); however, another item (in Lefkowitz) placed Lycurgus in the 7th Century BCE, so since there was probably more than one person by that name, the one quoted above is perhaps not

Plato's student; and after all of that, I later read that Speusippus was Plato's successor (Carroll, p.311)

Myia (6th-5th Century BCE)—daughter of Theano and Pythagoras

Perictyone (5th Century BCE)—philosopher, writer (works include *On Wisdom* and *On the Harmony of Women*, which deals with the relationship between body and spirit, thought and action), mother or sister of Plato

Plato (427-347 BCE)—directed a school called The Academy in Athens, which opened in 387 BCE; philosophy, physics, mathematics, and natural sciences were studied there

Pythagoras (582-500 BCE)—philosopher, known for the concept of the golden mean, directed a school in Croton (around 530 BCE)

Samothea—a Briton, invented letters, astronomy, science, and was head of the Hyperborean University at Cornwall where Pythagoras is supposed to have studied

Socrates (470-399 BCE)—Plato's predecessor, immortalized in Plato's Dialogues

Speusippus (4th Century BCE)—student of Plato, and his successor

Theano (540-510 BCE)—brilliant mathematician, and expert in early psychology, physics, and medicine, Pythagoras' successor as head of the Institute, supposed originator of the 'golden mean' concept, wife of Pythagoras

Beard, Mary R. *Woman as a Force in History*. New York: MacMillan, 1946. 313-314.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976

Carroll, Mitchell. *Women in All Ages and All Countries—Greek Women*. Philadelphia: The Rittenhouse Press, 1907.

Chicago, Judy. *The Dinner Party*. New York: Anchor Press, 1979.

Davis, Elizabeth Gould. *The First Sex*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979.

French, Marilyn. *On Power*. New York: Doubleday, 1979.

Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 123-124.

Menage, Gilles. tr. Beatrice H. Zedlar. *The History of Women Philosophers*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.

Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

## The Experiment

Dr. Edward Jenner (b.1749) is credited with discovering the small-pox vaccination; he did so by experimenting as described in “The Experiment” (injecting cowpox into the arm of a boy, James Phipps, then injecting smallpox to see if immunity had been achieved). First told by Jenner’s biographer and generally accepted, there is a record of a conversation with a milkmaid, several years earlier (1766 in Sodbury, England, where he was an apprentice), which catalyzed his experimentation/discovery: she had told him that she couldn’t possibly get small-pox because she had had cowpox. (The cow-pox was my idea.)

After I had written “The Experiment”, I read in Boulding (p. 597, footnoting Stenton p. 261) that Lady Montagu introduced the practice of vaccinating against smallpox into England from Turkey, where she observed its use while her husband was ambassador there.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976

Stenton, Doris M. *English Society in the Early Middle Ages*. New York: Penguin Books.

Sutcliffe, A. and A.P.D. Sutcliffe. *Stories from Science III*. Cambridge: University Press, 1965. 33-39.

## The Grapes

John Milton had three daughters: Anne (b. 1646), remembered for her deformity and speech disability, said to be unable even to write her name (Mary’s explanation of this in “The Grapes” is conjecture); Mary (b. 1648), remembered for being an undutiful daughter; Deborah (b. 1652), remembered for being the most devoted of the three and becoming his amanuensis.

The bit about the languages they learned to read, without understanding, is true, according to my research. Milton paid a lot to educate his nephew (that is, at an educational institution), but he spent nothing at all on his daughters’ education.

After he became blind (1652), he often called his daughters in the middle of the night to take down verses. When they ‘rebelled’, he sent them to learn gold and silver embroidery (a luxury trade to which the apprenticeship was onerous). But who the ‘them’ was is debatable, as are the dates of the daughters’ departure from home. There is speculation that only the eldest two, Anne and Mary, were sent away to learn embroidery, and apparently 1669 was the last year Deborah read for her father (she then

left for Ireland with a woman named Meriam), so I have set the story in about 1668, with Mary (20 years old) writing from 'away' to Deborah (16 years old) still at 'home' (presumably by choice).

The words attributed to Milton are indeed his. The words Mary read 'just the other day' are Garnett's.

And indeed his will left little 'recompense': he allotted a mere one hundred pounds to each of his "unkind daughters".

Of interest, Milton's first wife left him after one month.

Bush, Douglas. *John Milton: A Sketch of his Life and Writings*. New York: MacMillan, 1964.

Garnett, Richard. *Life and Writings of John Milton*. Pennsylvania: Folcroft, 1980.

Keightley, Thomas. *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1855.

Saillens, Emile. *John Milton: Man—Poet—Polemicist*. New York: Oxford, 1964.

## The Model

The Helen and Suzanne of "The Model" are the Fourment sisters. Helen married Rubens in 1630 when she was 16 (Rubens was then 53). She modelled for him throughout their marriage—overtly for Helen Fourment and two of her children and for *The Little Fur*, but, as one author said, "She could be found in one guise or another in virtually every major painting" (Avermaete); indeed, Edwards states that "In the romantic *Garden of Love*, all ten of the young women in the painting were based on the artist's wife and her many sisters" (p. 196).

Suzanne, it is speculated, had a brief affair with Rubens some time in 1627. She was the model for his painting *Le Chapeau de Paille* which was done in 1620, and apparently she sat for him on several other occasions. I have no proof that some of these occasions were for *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*: although the body type (luscious!) is right, the year (1617) makes it questionable—but I couldn't resist using that title in this piece.

Rubens (1577-1640) is a Flemish painter, perhaps known most for his portraits and his nudes. To be honest, I don't know if he signed his paintings (this in reference to a comment in "The Model").

Avermaete, Roger. *Rubens and His Times*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1968.

Edwards, Samuel. *Peter Paul Rubens: A Biography of a Giant*. New York: David McKay Co., 1973.

Wedgwood, C. V. et al. *The World of Rubens*. New York: Time Life Books, 1967.

## The Patent

According to Funk and Wagnalls, Eli Whitney designed and built the cotton gin in 1792, while a guest at Catherine Greene's plantation. More recent accounts identify Greene (1731-1814) as the inventor, accounting for the historical inaccuracy partly with the fact that women were not allowed to take out a patent at the time.

Catherine II (1726-1796) was a czarina; among her many accomplishments is the introduction of crop rotation to Russia.

The relationship between Catherine Greene and Catherine II is, as far as I know, fictional. Charlotte is also fictional, and 'the grandchildren' are mentioned without supporting fact.

I cheated on the mention of a "bleached potato bag": bleaching powder didn't come into use until 1799 and bleaching liquid even later than that (and I have no idea if potatoes were grown in Georgia in the late 18th century). I also may have cheated on the mention of sequins—I don't know when they were 'invented' and haven't been able to find out!

Of interest, Whitney and Miller (who married Greene in 1796) became partners and began to manufacture cotton gins, but because of a disastrous factory fire, they couldn't make enough to meet the market demands. Added to the fact that though the patent was issued in 1794, the decision needed to protect the patent wasn't made until 1807, and in 1812 renewal of the patent was denied to Whitney, very little money was made. In 1798, Whitney turned instead to the manufacture of firearms, and signed a contract to supply the Federal government with 10,000 military muskets. In 1900, he was one of the original 29 Americans chosen for the Hall of Fame.

Chicago, Judy. *The Dinner Party*. New York: Anchor Press, 1979.

Morse, Joseph Laffan et al. *Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Inc., 1972. vol. 25: 109-110; vol. 18: 354-355.

## The Portrait

The biographical aspects implied or referred to in "The Portrait" are factual (Leopold teaching Wolfgang at an earlier age than Nannerl; Nannerl playing with Wolfgang at the piano, teaching him; Nannerl allowed to perform in public only when Wolfgang was ready to do so; the typhus in Holland; the episode with J.C.Bach and Wolfgang; Leopold's decision to leave Nannerl at home when he went to Italy with Wolfgang). So are the tours mentioned, the advertisements, and the reviews. And, of course, factual too are the portraits by Carmontelle: the alleged original and the revision.

The fiction is Nannerl's response and, of course, her mother's letter to her about it.

Levey, Michael. *Life and Death of Mozart*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Seroff, Victor. *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. New York: MacMillan, 1965.

## The Protest

Agnodice established her obstetric practice in Athens, in 4th century BCE, but because it was illegal for a woman or a slave to practise medicine, she did so disguised as a man. Her business thrived, many women preferring to be examined by a woman (she revealed her true gender to her patients). When her male colleagues charged 'him' with 'corrupting' patients, she was faced with the dilemma described in the second paragraph of "The Protest". Fortunately, some of her influential friends lobbied their husbands (Jack suggests with a 'sexual boycott'); the law was repealed and Agnodice pardoned.

I made up the 'AAG', the 'Athenian Code of Laws', and the patients' names.

Regarding the last line of "The Protest"—during the witch hunt era, thousands (?) of women were killed for practising medicine.

Jack, Donald. *Rogues, Rebels, and Geniuses*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1981.

## The Ride

It is fact that Godiva (or 'Godgifu') was the wife of Leofric, who was the earl of Mercia and lord of Coventry (around 1040-1085). And she did indeed ride naked through the town. And it was to secure his promise that he would lower the taxes, per her request, if she did so.

Other passing items of fact include the relative poverty of the peasants, the lack of education for women at the time, Ethelfled and her achievements (911-918), and the practice of consulting wives about public policy; and Leopold did establish a Benedictine monastery, in 1043. The rest, including Gawaina, is fiction.

Unfortunately, I neglected to note the books I used to research this one.

## The Ring

Martha Bernays was born in 1861 in Germany; at the age of 25 she married Sigmund Freud, and according to all the accounts I have read (there are few indeed that mention her\*), she became 'the perfect little housewife'. Minna, her sister, came to

live with Sigmund and Martha after Anna's birth (1895). There is controversy over the relationship between Sigmund and Minna; some speculate there was sexual involvement and a subsequent abortion (Isbister, p. 133).

Other biographical references in "The Ring" are factual: Martha's childhood and family background; her courtship—the long discussions and letters as well as the conflicts and Martha's other admirers; Sigmund's 'confession' about Martha's intelligent writing; her many pregnancies/children—six in eight years; the arguments about the candles and the children's names; the incident with Sigmund's sister's piano. The bit about Sigmund's belief that sexual intercourse remedies anxiety and his consequent regular rape of Martha is conjectured from his documented belief that coitus interruptus and prolonged sexual abstinence causes anxiety in women.

Freud (1856-1939) was a psychoanalyst remembered most for his views on sexuality; those presented in "The Ring" are, to the best of my abilities, accurately described (as are his views on women apart from their sexuality).

Lou Salomé, like Martha Bernays, was born in 1861, but in Russia. At 22, she became close friends with Rée and Nietzsche. At 36, she became close to Rainer Maria Rilke. And at 52, she attended one of Freud's lectures and then became one of his closest friends until he died; his daughter, Anna, also became close to her. And she did indeed receive one of the rings as described in "The Ring". (Other recipients include Marie Bonaparte, Helen Deutsch, Hilda Doolittle, and Anna Freud.) Although the books I read that mention Salomé mention first and foremost her relationships with men of note, she was a philosopher, writer, and psychoanalyst in her own right (Martha's passing references to Lou's life and accomplishments are not fictional): her stories, essays, and novels made her famous; she wrote the first feminist study of Ibsen's women and a study of Nietzsche (neither is in print); she has left many unpublished manuscripts, letters, and diaries, as well as a published autobiography; and she was one of the first practising women psychoanalysts.

Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a philosopher remembered most perhaps for his theories of the superman and slave morality. His views on women which I have presented in "The Ring" are, to the best of my abilities, accurately described. (The phrases in quotation marks are either verbatim quotations or very close paraphrases.)

I have dated the letter to 1925: both women would be 64, Martha, well past the childcare phase of her life, and Lou, a practising psychoanalyst in Goltvigen, having exchanged letters with Sigmund for about 10 years. (Martha died in 1952 at 90, Lou in 1937 at 72.)

Of interest, I was particularly appalled reading Binion. Several accounts describe Nietzsche's repeated desire to marry Lou and Lou's repeated rejection of the idea. Nietzsche himself, in *My Sister and I*, says "had I married my slavish princess [Lou], I might have been happy . . . how could she have resisted me? . . ." (10,20). But Binion says Lou's "fiction and some of her later friendships represent repeated attempts to cope

with her rejection by Nietzsche” (p. vi). He goes on to say that “her trouble in being a woman was at the source . . . of her whole mental life” (p.ix) and that “her accounts of herself . . . are really fanciful through and through . . .” (p. x).

\*And so perhaps my presumed blatant misrepresentation of her personality is more acceptable when one recognizes that it is unwise to conclude anything, perhaps especially that she really was a good little hausfrau, based on such a small sample.

Binion, Rudolph. *Frau Lou—Nietzsche’s Wayward Disciple*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Clarke, Ronald W. *Freud—The Man and his Cause*. New York: Random House, 1980.

Freeman, Lucy. *Freud and Women*. New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1981.

Friedan, Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1963.

Isbister, J. N. *Freud—An Introduction to his Life and Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985.

Jones, Ernest. *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953. vol. 1.

Kennedy, J. M. *Nietzsche*. New York: Haskell, 1974.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Gordon Press, 1974.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. New York: Penguin, 1979.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *My Sister and I*. New York: Boar’s Head Books, 1951.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. New York: Penguin, 1961.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Will to Power*. New York: Random House, 1968.

Peters, H.F. *Zarathustra’s Sister*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977.

Peters, H. F. *My Sister, My Spouse*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1962.

Salome, Lou. tr. Stanley A. Leary. *The Freud Journal of Lou Andreas-Salomé*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1964.

## The Stone

Properzia de Rossi (1490-1530) was an Italian sculptor who worked with several media, but is most remembered (when she is remembered) for her peach stone pieces (as described in “The Stone” and currently in the Grassi Museum in Bologna). Her teacher was Marcantonio Raimondi, and one of her friends was Raphael. Benetta is a figment of my imagination—as far as I know. In addition to sculpting, Properzia could sing and play an instrument, and her skill in the sciences was envied by men.

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was also an Italian sculptor; his “David” is eighteen feet tall.

Anastasia (around 1404) is known for her miniature painting.

I have written the letter as it might have been in 1510. In the 1520s, Properzia began to work in portrait busts and bas-reliefs (according to Clement [p. 300], seeing the

folly of belittling her talents by working in miniatures). When she asked for a share in decorating the three doors of the facade of S. Petronia (work in marble), the jury said they would consider her request only if she submitted marble work; she sculpted two angels for the church, but I'm not sure if that was the audition or the commission. She was (later?) commissioned to do the canopy of the high altar in the newly restored church of S. Maria del Baraccano.

However, Properzia "became so popular with the public that she roused the intense jealousy of her male colleagues" and "they began a crusade against her so that her commissioned work was not mounted on the public building it was prepared for, and she dies at forty of 'mortification and grief'" (Clement, p. 300).

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976

Clement, Clara Erskine. *Women in the Fine Arts*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1904.

Fine, Elsa Honig. *Women and Art*. New Jersey: Allanheld and Schram, 1978.

Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. New Jersey: Biblio Dist., 1980.

## IV. SOLILOQUIES

Each of these women is from one of William Shakespeare's plays. These were my primary sources:

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Ballantine, 1983)

Jameson, Anne. *Shakespeare's Heroines* (Pennsylvania: Folcroft, 1913)

Russell, Diana. *Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1986)

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works*. Edited by G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968)

### Desdemona (*Othello*)

Othello chooses Cassio to be his lieutenant instead of Iago. This makes Iago angry, so he begins to suggest to Othello that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful to him, with Cassio, who is a friend to both Othello and Desdemona. Iago also asks his own wife, Emilia, to steal a certain handkerchief from Desdemona, one given to her by Othello; when Desdemona drops the handkerchief one day, Emilia picks it up and gives it to Iago. After a few other lies, Iago shows the handkerchief to Othello, telling him that he saw Cassio wipe his head with it. Othello becomes increasingly harsh toward Desdemona, and then begins to strike her; a bit later, convinced of her infidelity and refusing to believe her insistence to the contrary, he kills her. Emilia then tells Othello the truth about the handkerchief; seeing that Othello believes her, Iago kills her.

Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*) is another victim of jealousy and suspicion: her newborn baby is taken from her to be killed (because her husband refuses to raise someone else's child) and she is imprisoned for treason and incontinence.

Imogen (*Cymbeline*) was the subject of a wager made by her husband (*Posthumus*) and a friend (*Iachimo*)—the bet was whether the latter could seduce Imogen (or whether she would prove faithful to the former). Posthumus said that if Iachimo won, they'd still be friends because then she'd not be worth fighting about. And it was Posthumus who proposed that if women were unfaithful, then all men were bastards (and for this reason, he resented needing women to procreate).

### Isabella (*Measure for Measure*)

Angelo is a deputy left in charge while the Duke of Vienna supposedly goes on a journey (actually the Duke stays, disguised as a friar). At once, Angelo closes the brothels and brings back a law whereby any man who impregnates a woman (presumably who is not his wife) is to be put to death. Claudio commits this offense (with his fiancée, Juliet). His sister, Isabella, about to become a nun, goes to plead for his life. She is told by Angelo that Claudio will be freed if she'll have sex with him (lose her virginity, lose her honour). She is appalled (and refuses), and tells Claudio, assuming he would rather die than have her go through with it.

(Unfortunately that's not how Claudio feels; Mariana, previously engaged to Angelo, pretends to be Isabella and 'meets' his terms; Angelo doesn't keep his end of the bargain and orders Claudio to be executed anyway, but another prisoner's head (already decapitated) is presented instead; the Duke 'returns'; Isabella tells him what has happened; Angelo says Isabella is mad, but the Duke has seen it all and sentences Angelo to death; Isabella now pleads for Angelo's life; Angelo is pardoned and marries Mariana, Claudio marries Juliet, and the Duke asks Isabella to marry him.)

### Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*)

This is a love story between two young people (Romeo and Juliet) who belong to rival families (the Montagues and the Capulets). They meet at a masquerade party and fall in love at first sight—before they know who the other is (that is, to what family they belong). In the famous balcony scene ("Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" II.ii, l.33), Juliet pours out her longing for Romeo in to the night. Romeo, who has come to catch a glimpse of Juliet, or perhaps to pledge his love, or perhaps to 'steal a kiss', listens for a while, then makes his presence known. Delighted to discover a reciprocal intensity, they exchange passionate words and Juliet bids Romeo go (at which point he says, "Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" and Juliet replies, "What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" II.ii, l.125-126); he is to send word to her the next day if he intends marriage.

They are married by a friar, in secret, and arrange to consummate the marriage that night. The second balcony scene has Juliet eagerly waiting for Romeo's arrival ("Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night . . ." III:ii, l.17 . . .). But complications arise: Romeo, a Montague, gets involved in a gang fight and accidentally kills Tybalt, a Capulet; he is therefore banished. Distraught, Romeo goes to the Friar, speaking of suicide as preferable to banishment and separation from Juliet. Encouraged by the Friar and Juliet's nurse (who arrives to find him and tell him how distraught Juliet is, waiting for a Romeo who will not, can not, show), Romeo goes to Juliet—they spend what's left of the night together, and Romeo leaves at dawn, as he must.

The Friar tries to reunite them, but the fake death of Juliet (brought on by a strong sleeping potion) is believed to be genuine by Romeo (who didn't get the letter explaining otherwise); he kills himself, unable to live without Juliet; she awakens, sees Romeo dead, feels the same way, and commits suicide as well.

### Kate (*The Taming of the Shrew*)

This play is often considered one of Shakespeare's comedies. In it, an older sister, Kate, considered unattractive with a personality to match, is betrothed against her will to a man named Petruchio (who, like the rest of Kate's suitors, wants her father's money). Because custom demanded that an older sister be married before a younger, this pleases many people—for Bianca, the younger, considered beautiful and gentle-tempered, has many suitors and has been waiting a long time to be able to marry one of them. (One of these is Hortensio; when Bianca chooses Lucentio instead, he quickly changes his tune from adoration to insult.)

The dowry is paid, the ceremony is performed (after Kate is kept waiting and humiliated by a late and scruffily-dressed Petruchio), and Petruchio takes Kate away before any of the celebrations. Back at his house, Petruchio, determined to 'tame' Kate, treats her much like an animal: she is locked up, starved of food and sleep, and subjected to various emotional cruelties (for instance, the cap and gown incident cited in "Kate").

After a while (the battering scene described in "Kate", supposed to happen during this 'while', is pure conjecture), they visit her father. On the way, Petruchio threatens to turn around and go back home every time she hesitates to obey or agree with him; she therefore becomes acquiescent, no matter how ridiculous the command or comment. Once at the house, Petruchio proposes a wager to Lucentio and Hortensio (married now to Bianca and 'the widow', respectively): "Let's each one send unto his wife, / And he whose wife is most obedient / Shall win the wager which we shall propose" (V:ii, l.66-69). Petruchio wins, and Kate delivers a very subservient-sounding speech: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for

thee” (V:ii, l.146-147); “I am ashamed that women are so simple / To offer war where they should kneel for peace, / Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway, / When they are bound to serve, love, and obey” (V:ii, l.161-164).

Often forgotten about *The Taming of the Shrew* is the Induction which precedes Act I. In it, a joke is played on a drunkard (Sly) who has fallen asleep in an alehouse: a lord instructs the drunk to be taken to one of his chambers, “wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers, / a most delicious banquet by his bed, / And brave attendants near him when he wakes” (Induction:i, l.38-40). When he awakens, the charade is maintained to such a length that a page dresses up as a woman and acts like the man’s wife, “overjoyed to see her noble lord restored to health, who for this seven years hath esteemed him no better than a poor and loathsome beggar (Induction:i, l.120-123). Sly believes it, players appear, and he commands ‘his’ messenger to let them play “a kind of history” (Induction:ii, l.144). What they perform is *The Taming of the Shrew*—thus it is a play within a play.

Unfortunately, the version that is most popular omits the final scene in which Sly, again having drunk until he passed out, is carried back into the alehouse and left to come to; he does, finds himself no longer a lord, decides he must’ve been dreaming, and staggers home.

Of interest: long after this had been written, I read Charles Marowitz’s *Shrew*—it’s excellent!

## Lady MacBeth (*MacBeth*)

Lady MacBeth and her husband plan to murder the King of Scotland (Duncan), believing that if he were dead, MacBeth would be crowned King. Lady MacBeth provides most of the will and the strategy, and MacBeth performs the act: their ambition is realized, MacBeth is named King.

Plagued by guilt, MacBeth begins to hallucinate; more murders are planned and executed in order to keep the throne and its lineage. Also guilt-ridden, Lady MacBeth begins to sleepwalk and eventually kills herself. (MacBeth is killed shortly after, and Malcolm, Duncan’s son, is crowned King.)

## Marina (*Pericles*)

Marina, born at sea during a storm, is left by her father (her mother had died during the childbirth) with a woman, Dionyza, to be raised as one of her own. Dionyza, however, becomes jealous as Marina outshines her own daughter, so she plans to have Marina murdered. Her plan is interrupted by pirates who capture Marina, try unsuccessfully to seduce her, then sell her to a brothel.

The Bawd (the woman in charge of the brothel) is pleased to have Marina, because her other three “with continual action are even as good as rotten” (IV:ii, 1.8-9). She has her cried in the marketplace for her virginity—”He that will give most shall have her first” (IV:ii, 1.63-64)—and she instructs her to ‘do it’ with fear and tears because then out of pity the customer would pay more. However, much to the Bawd’s anger, Marina talks with her customers, and prays: not only do they leave without getting what they came for, they don’t come back, reformed from ‘rutting’ forever. Eventually the mayor, who frequents the brothel in disguise, comes for “a dozen of virginity” (IV:vi, 1.22) “that a man may deal withal, and defy the surgeon” (IV:vi, 1.28-29)—it was believed that intercourse with a virgin would cure syphilis; Marina speaks with him, exposing his hypocrisy, and he too goes away ‘unserved’. Obviously displeased, the Bawd encourages her servant to rape Marina, assuming that that would successfully initiate her into service; Marina offers to make just as much money for them by singing, weaving, sewing, and dancing—and she is thus ‘saved’.

### Miranda (*The Tempest*)

Said to be a summation of Shakespeare’s work (it is the last comedy he wrote), *The Tempest* tells the story of Prospero (a Duke) and his daughter, Miranda, living in exile on an island. Caliban, “a freckled whelp hag-born—not honoured with a human shape” (I:ii, 1.283-284), is the only other ‘person’ on the island (there is also Ariel, but he is a magical spirit); he has attempted, at least once, to rape Miranda and thus ‘people the isle with Calibans’ (I:ii, 1.350-351).

Prospero commands a passing ship to wreck (he can do this), and all of its passengers survive, cast upon the shores of the island: Alonso and Sebastian (King of Naples and his brother), Ferdinand (the King’s son and, therefore, a prince), Antonio (Prospero’s brother, unjustly Duke of Milan), Stephano (a drunken butler who, once on the island and hearing about Miranda from Caliban, plans to take over by killing Prospero and making Miranda queen), and a few others.

Miranda and Ferdinand see each other and fall in love (Miranda has been on the island since she was a baby, so this is the first man she’s seen besides her father). Since she is a virgin (“Oh, if a virgin . . . I’ll make you Queen of Naples” I:ii, 1.448), they are engaged (“Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition, worthily purchased, take my daughter. But if thou dost break her virgin knot before all sanctimonious ceremonies may with full and holy rite be ministered . . .” IV:i, 1.13-17); Ferdinand promises to be honourable, as he hopes “for quiet days, fair issue, and long life” (IV:i, 1.24).

## Ophelia (*Hamlet*)

At the opening of the play, Ophelia and Hamlet are romantically interested in each other. Ophelia's brother, Laertes, and her father, Polonius (counsel to the King and Queen, Hamlet's new step-father and mother) discourage her, giving various reasons (the ones I discuss in "Ophelia"); her father orders her not to speak or write to Hamlet again, and she vows to obey. In the meantime, Hamlet's dead father appears to him and tells him that Claudius, the new step-father and King, had killed him, and Hamlet swears to avenge his death.

Shortly after, Hamlet bursts into Ophelia's room, rather crazed; under oath to her father, she says and does nothing. Later, also acting in accordance with her father's wishes, she returns Hamlet's letters. Later still, at the performance of a play, *The Mousetrap*, written to expose Claudius, Hamlet chooses to sit near Ophelia; they 'talk'.

The play does indeed expose Claudius; Hamlet confronts his mother, the Queen, and then kills Polonius by mistake. Claudius quickly sends Hamlet to England, to be murdered on the way. (Thus the second time Hamlet comes to Ophelia in her room, to which I refer in "Ophelia", is a complete fabrication. But the lines I have her speak after that scene are from the play: they are the nonsense songs referred to below.)

After a few appearances of questionable sanity (she sings nonsense songs and scatters flowers), Ophelia is found floating in the river, believed to have committed suicide. This view is voiced by clowns (V:i, l.1-3); the Queen, however, describes the death (IV:vii, l.166-183) as I have.

(The word 'nunnery' can also mean a brothel. A kirtle is an outer skirt; a farthingale is a large roll of padding worn to make the kirtle stand out. The flowers have symbolic significance: fennel—flattery; columbine—cuckoldry; violets—unfaithfulness; daisies—dissembly; rue—sorrow and repentance; rosemary—remembrance; dogrose (common wildrose)—pleasure mixed with pain (and believed by the ancient Greeks to cure the bite of mad dogs).

## Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*)

Portia's father, now deceased, left explicit instructions in his will regarding her marriage. Only a suitor who passed the test of choosing 'correctly' among three caskets (of gold, silver, and lead) was to be accepted by Portia as her husband. Fortunately, the ones Portia would reject fail the test (my list is fairly true to Shakespeare's), and the one she would choose, Bassanio, succeeds.

However, before the test and marriage, Bassanio had asked a friend of his, Antonio,

to sign a loan for him, from Shylock; Antonio's own flesh would be collateral (the loan was needed to woo and impress Portia, who, Bassanio was well aware, was "richly left," I:ii, l.161). Antonio generously agrees to do so, but unfortunately all of his vessels are shipwrecked and he is unable to repay the loan; Shylock demands his flesh. Portia (now wife of Bassanio) offers to pay the loan, but Shylock remains firm in his claim. Bassanio leaves Portia to see what he can do for Antonio.

Believing Antonio to be as good a man as Bassanio (for they are friends), Portia disguises herself as a lawyer and appears at the court to plead for Antonio. Her lady, Nerissa (recently married to Gratiano, Bassanio's man) accompanies her, disguised as a clerk. The trial proceeds, Portia speaking for Bassanio's friend (in spite of Bassanio's claim that he would give up his wife to save Antonio, IV:i, l.282-287), and delivering the famous speech about mercy ("The quality of mercy is not strained . . ." IV:i, l.184 . . .). The Duke judges in Antonio's favour. Portia begins to leave, but Bassanio insists the lawyer name some payment. She names the wedding ring he wears (given to him by her with the words "When you part from, lose, or give away, let it presage the ruin of your love," III:ii, l.174-175); he is reluctant, but upon Antonio's pleading ("Let his deservings and my love withal, be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment," IV:i, l.450-451), he gives it. Nerissa, as clerk, also acquires the ring she gave to Gratiano. They part.

When all have returned, Portia presents the ring to Bassanio, telling him that she obtained it when she slept with the lawyer. Nerissa claims to have slept with the clerk, and she too presents her ring. For a moment, there is concern about being cuckolded, but Portia quickly tells the whole story, thus relieving the men.

Viola (*Twelfth Night*) and Rosalind (*As You Like It*) are two other characters who temporarily disguise themselves as men in order to more freely, more effectively, interact in the world.

### Regan (*King Lear*)

Nearing death, King Lear calls his three daughters to him, intending to divide his land among them, the largest portion to go to the one who loves him the most. Goneril (the eldest) and Regan (the middle) speak as expected: "I love you more than words can wield" (I:i, l.56) and "I profess myself an enemy to all other joys . . ." (I:i, l.74-75). But the words of Cordelia (the youngest) are disappointing—"I love your Majesty according to my bond, nor more nor less" (I:i, l.125)—and her 'bland' response angers him so much that he disinherits her altogether, much to the surprise of all in attendance. (As in other cases, there is more to the play, but as it's irrelevant to the soliloquy, it's omitted from the synopsis.)

The phrase "one in every six" refers to the number of women incestuously assaulted.



## V. FAIRY TALES

The characters in this section are from fairy tales. Since many fairy tales exist in several versions, some with important differences (see “Thumb”), I often read more than one version and used a conglomerate as my starting point.

My main source books were the following:

Wodehouse, Helen M. et al. *The Golden Pathway*. Nottingham: Cultural Publications Ltd., 1931.

*Grimm's Fairy Tales*. intro. Frances Clarke Sayers. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1968.

*The Green Fairy Book*. ed. Andrew Lang. London: Longman, 1949.

*The Red Fairy Book*. ed. Andrew Lang. London: Longman, 1950.

*The Yellow Fairy Book*. ed. Andrew Lang. London: Longman, 1949.

In addition, I directly and indirectly used some of the comments and ideas in the following:

Heilbrun, Carolyn Heilbrun. *Reinventing Womanhood*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Lieberman, Marcia Lieberman. “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale.” *College English* 34 (December 1972): 383-395.

Rowe, Karen E. “Feminism and Fairy Tales.” *Women's Studies* 6 (1979): 237-257.

Stone, Kay. “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us.” *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975): 42-49.

## Alice

Alice is from “The Fisherman and his Wife”. The story begins pretty much how I’ve told it (without the parenthetical comments) (though his wife’s name really was Alice, and he never calls her that to her face). However, starting with the moment he grabs the beer and sits down to watch the game, I’ve changed things a bit: in the original story, she does go on to want a castle instead of a cottage, and then to be king, then to be emperor, then pope, but we are not given much in the way of reasons, and for each desire, the fisherman goes to the fish, makes the request, and is granted the wish. But when she wants to be “lord of the sun and moon”, the fish puts them back into the ditch, and the story ends.

## Catherine

Catherine is the name I’ve given to the woman in “Rumpelstiltskin”. One day a vain and proud miller boasted about his beautiful and clever daughter to the king, telling him that she could spin gold out of straw. The poor maiden denied it, but the king locked her in a room full of straw and insisted that she spin it into gold or else she’d lose her life.

Once in the room, she began to cry; then “a droll-looking little man” appeared and, after hearing her story, offered to do it for her if she’d give him her necklace. When the king returned and saw that the straw had indeed been spun into gold, he locked up the maiden with another roomful of straw. This time she paid the little man with her ring. The third time, the king added the promise of marriage if she succeeded, but she had nothing left with which to pay the little man. He asked for her first child, and having no other option, fearing death if the king returned to find straw and not gold, she agreed.

So she was married to the king, and when her first child was born, the little man came to collect. Appalled, she offered him instead “all the treasures of the Kingdom” — but he wanted the child. Eventually he softened his terms and said that if within three days she could tell him his name, she could keep the child.

For the next two days, she guessed all the names she knew and sent messengers all over the land to gather new ones. Finally, on the third day, a messenger returned with the name ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ — which was indeed the little man’s name. She was therefore able to keep her child, and everyone laughed at the little man, Rumpelstiltskin, as he made his way away.

## Cinderella

Angry because Cinderella's sweetness and goodness made her own proud daughters appear the worse, Cinderella's stepmother made her do the hardest work and sleep in a straw bed. But Cinderella did not complain; she helped the two sisters prepare for a ball even as they insulted her. However, as soon as they left, Cinderella began to cry. Her fairy godmother appeared and granted Cinderella her wish to go to the ball, turning a pumpkin into a carriage, six mice into beautiful horses, and Cinderella's shabby clothes into a gown of gold and silver; she also gave Cinderella a pair of glass slippers to wear. There was one condition: if Cinderella didn't return before midnight, all would turn back as they were. So Cinderella went to the ball and all the guests were impressed—especially the king's son, who invited her back to the next evening's ball.

That night, the sisters told Cinderella all about the beautiful, mysterious princess who had been at the ball (they hadn't recognized her), and Cinderella asked one of them if she could borrow her yellow dress to go to the next night's ball to see this princess, but the sister said no.

The next evening, with her fairy godmother's help as before, Cinderella went to the ball—but she forgot the time. Leaving in a terrible rush as the clock struck midnight, she dropped one of the glass slippers. The Prince picked it up and declared that he would marry the person whose foot fit the slipper. Well, all the princesses and duchesses and great ladies, and the two stepsisters, gave it a try—all in vain. But of course, the slipper fit Cinderella perfectly. So she was married to the Prince (and forgave her sisters, taking them to live with her in the palace) and presumably lived happily ever after.

Of interest, in the original story, the slipper was fur, but along the way the word for 'fur' was mistranslated to 'glass'.

## Gretel

In the story "Hansel and Gretel", two children are taken into the forest by their father and stepmother, to be left to die because there is not enough food to feed them; this solution is the stepmother's idea, and her "We'll come back for you" was simply a lie. The story unfolds exactly as I've described it—the spool of thread, the breadcrumbs, the witch's house, Hansel in the cage, Gretel and the oven, their escape—and they find their way back home to live happily ever after. (The mean stepmother had died.)

## Greystrands

This one is my “Little Goldilocks and the Three Bears” of course. There were three bears (Great Rough Bear, Mother Bear, and Little Wee Bear) who lived in a forest. One morning they made porridge, and then went for a walk while it cooled. Coming upon their house and smelling porridge, a little girl named Goldilocks, who had beautiful golden hair, knocked at the door. There was no answer but since the door was open, she went inside. The porridge was too hot, so she decided to wait until it cooled. The first chair she sat in was too big; so was the next; but the third was just right (well, actually, it wasn’t because it broke when she sat in it). After a while, she tried the porridge: the first bowl was too hot; so was the second one; but the third one was just right. Then she went to lie on a bed and rest: the first one was too hard, the second too soft, the third just right. Eventually the three bears came home and after finding the broken chair and the empty bowl, they found her in bed, sleeping. Startled and afraid when she woke, she sprang from the bed and ran all the way home.

Another version titled just “The Three Bears” features an old woman instead of a little girl. The old woman was “impudent”, for instead of knocking first, she simply checked to make sure no one was home, then walked right in. Also, she cursed when the chair broke and complained about the little bowl being too little. When the three bears came home and found her, she ran out the window: “Whether she broke her neck in the fall or ran into the wood and was lost there or found her way out of the wood and was taken up by the constable for a vagrant as she was, no one can tell.”

“OAS” and “GIS” refer to government supplemental assistance programs for pensioners.

## The King’s Daughter

This king’s daughter is from “The Frog Prince”. She was playing with a ball one day and it fell down a well. A frog retrieved it, then named his fee: he asked to be her friend, to sit beside her at the dinner table, to eat off her plate, to drink out of her cup, to sleep beside her in bed, to be loved by her. Since she had already accepted her ball back, he began to ‘collect’ his fee, accompanying her everywhere. She often asked him to go away, but he refused. She set him outside, but he came back. Finally one day, out of frustration at his insistent and constant closeness, she threw him against a wall. But that wasn’t the end of it: the impact changed him into a prince, they married, and lived happily ever after. (And that was the end.)

## Little Red Riding Hood

Little Red Riding Hood is sent by her mother to visit her sick grandmother with cake and a pot of butter. As she walks through a path in the wood, a wolf approaches her and offers to carry her parcel for her; she says ‘no thank you’ since her destination is only on the other side of the wood. The wolf leaves her then, but runs ahead to the grandmother’s house and gets in her bed, hoping to deceive and entice Little Red Riding Hood so he can eat her. When she arrives, he asks her to lie down beside him to rest; she does so and begins to comment on how the sickness seems to have changed her grandmother so much. When the wolf leaps up to eat her, a wasp stings him, then the door flies open and an arrow “pierced him through and through”. Standing in the doorway was the Green Archer, keeper of the forest.

In another version entitled “Little Golden Hood”, the girl’s hood is magical and burns the wolf as he moves in for a bite; and the grandmother “who had risen early to sell herbs in town” returns in time to catch the wolf in her sack and dump him into the well, where he drowns.

The mention of Peter is a reference to “Peter and the Wolf” (though all the hunters have failed, a little boy named Peter succeeds in catching a large and ferocious wolf) and the ‘three little pigs’ are the “Three Little Pigs” (a little pig succeeds with his cleverness in defending himself against, and eventually killing, a big bad wolf).

## Sleeping Beauty

Angry at not being on the guest list, a “withered old fairy” showed up for a christening feast at the palace; and after the other fairies had given gifts of beauty, grace, charm, and so on, she declared that when the child was sixteen years old, she would prick her finger on a spindle and die. Fortunately, another fairy had suspected something like that and had hid so she could give her gift last: she changed the death of the withered old fairy’s ‘gift’ to a deep sleep that would last until a king’s son would come and awaken her. In spite of precautions (all spindles were removed), the child, sixteen years later, pricked her finger and became unconscious; a thick forest grew all around the castle.

A few generations later, a prince saw the distant castle, was told the story, and “not doubting that he would succeed, he galloped off at once”; “a way through the thick tangle of trees and thorns seemed to open before him,” he found the princess in one of the rooms, and kissed her hand. She awoke, saw him, and said “Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you a long time.” They married and “lived happily ever afterwards.”

In another version, entitled “Rosebud”, the revised curse was that the child would fall asleep for a hundred years, and the day the prince set out for the castle was “that very day that the hundred years were completed.”

With regard to the other fairy tales mentioned, in “Beauty and the Beast”, for the sake of her father, the heroine devotes herself to the Beast, who responds favourably to her presence; in “The Goose Girl”, the heroine is pathetically passive; in “Felicia and the Pot of Pinks”, the heroine submits to ill-treatment; in both “Rapunzel” and “Rosette”, the heroine is locked up in a tower; in “Mayblossom”, the heroine starves herself, giving her food to the man who abuses her; in “The Girl Without Hands”, a father is encouraged by his daughter to mutilate her in order to save himself; in “The Twelve Brothers”, the heroine offers herself as sacrifice to save her brothers and later her husband burns her; in “Bluebeard”, Bluebeard makes a habit of killing his wives.

## Snow White

Both “Little Snow White” and “Snow-Drop” tell the same story. One day when the queen asked her mirror who was the fairest of them all, the answer was Snow White, her stepdaughter. So she arranged for a hunter to take Snow White into the forest and kill her. Instead, he allowed her to run away.

Eventually she came upon a little cottage, the home of seven dwarfs. They allowed her to stay as long as she agreed to do the chores and meet them at the door every day with a smile.

Meanwhile, the queen’s mirror implied that Snow White was still alive. After a couple of failed attempts (corseting stays that suffocated and a poisoned comb—the dwarfs revived Snow White both times), the queen managed to kill Snow White with a poisoned apple. Unable to revive her this time, the dwarfs put her in a glass coffin.

A passing prince was shown Snow White in the coffin; “he fell in love with her at once” and offered to pay any amount for her. The dwarfs agreed to give Snow White to him and as his attendants lifted the coffin, the piece of poisoned apple fell out of her mouth; she opened her eyes and tried to sit up. She was then freed from the coffin and she and the prince were married.

## Thumb

This is a reaction to “Tom Thumb” and “Thumbelina” (and a bunch of other things!). These two fairy tales are accurately (and sufficiently) summarized in “Thumb”, so I will say no more.

## The Wicked Stepmother

This one is not based on any single fairy tale. The wicked stepmother figure is common throughout the genre (though perhaps she is remembered most in “Snow White” and “Cinderella”), so I thought she should get a chance to have her say too.

## The youngest princess

This one is based on the story, “The Enchanted Pig”. In it, a princess is married to a pig, as was prophesized; she accepts her fate. The pig, however, is a prince under a spell: for a certain length of time he is to be imprisoned in the form of a pig by day, to be himself only at night when no one can see him. One day, a witch tells the princess that the spell will be broken if she ties a magic thread around his toe at night. She does so, but the thread breaks and he awakes. Extremely angry since the spell would’ve expired in three days, but now it would linger on and on, he leaves, telling her to search for him until she wears out three pairs of iron shoes. She performs this penance (and more—the ladder she climbs that leads into his house is just a bit too short, so she cuts off her little finger as it’s just the right length to make up the difference) and they live happily ever after.