

## OUT OF THE ASHES.

Research for a video installation about the place of female sexuality within the mythologies of fire.

### 1. Introduction.

#### CINDERELLA

(Etm., German. Ash putal. lit., 'Ash pussy'.)

She tends the hearth.

She sits in the embers and waits and dreams.

She is an exile from her own power/sexuality/  
fertility.

Like the embers, she is the remains of a  
bigger fire.

Out of the Ashes is a video installation which, in dealing with fire and its mythical and social connotations, became an allegorical celebration of women's sexuality. The monitors are arranged in a half circle representing a hearth, so that the piece is like a contemporary creation myth which grows from a reverie whilst gazing into a fire.

In researching into fire mythology, a complex layer of changing perceptions of women was revealed. Women's Sexuality seemed fundamental to fire mythology even though the popular notion of fire is as a symbol of masculinity and a force for destruction.

It became apparent that in Catholicism and Christianity, remnants of earlier symbols and rituals still remain, though the meanings have shifted if not been completely reversed; so that basically pagan, archetypal images have filtered down into the still essentially Christian society which we occupy today. Fire is still largely seen as a death symbol derived from Catholic concepts like Hell and Apocalypse; whereas in paganism, fire was used to celebrate fertility and the changing of the seasons. In earlier matriachal religions, the Goddess of the Hearth, Hestia or Vesta was the Mother of the Gods, her temple was the centre of the community.

In South American and Aborigine myths about fire, women hold the secret of fire within themselves, in their vaginas- the womb then, was the mythical centre.

We have inherited an intensely complex set of symbols layered with different meanings, most of which are negative for women and yet embody earlier, more celebratory meanings.

A detailed study of fire mythology reveals both a profound fear of women and the possibility of a powerful celebratory female sexuality which is rooted in our culture and pre culture though it is still denied to us. Tracing backwards through history it becomes clear that a shift has taken place from women's sexuality being the centre of religious belief to the complete denigration of women which resulted in millions of women being burnt as witches.

As a parallel to the research on fire mythology, I have headed the chapters with various female figures who are associated with fire.

Cinderella, who is left with the cinders, an empty hearth. The Harlot of Babylon, from the New Testament, who is held responsible for all the sins of the world and who is to be destroyed by fire, though implicitly, she is fire itself. Vesta, who is the Hearth, the centre of the community. Brigit, who is the Celtic Goddess of Fire and inspiration and Pandora who is a punishment to Mankind for the theft of fire.

In almost all these myths, fire and womb are interchangeable, Cinderella, from the German translates literally as 'ash pussy', the Harlot holds a chalice which is 'full of the sins of her fornications'. Vesta and Brigit are Goddesses of fire and fertility and Pandora opens her 'box' or 'jar' and releases suffering on the world. Like the Harlot of Babylon, Pandora's desirability/sexuality are seen as abominations; Pandora though is man-made, whereas the Harlot seem to be a remnant of an earlier powerful archetype who must be destroyed.

OUT OF THE ASHES sought both to deconstruct misogyny and to build on that deconstruction - so that out of the ashes, new possibilities present themselves.

The installation travels through the mythologies of blood and fire, misogyny and Christianity, the persecution of witches and taboos on menstruation to become a celebration of womens laughter, intuition and sexuality.

These notes present some of the background research to the piece.

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## FIRE SYMBOLISM IN CATHOLICISM.

### THE HARLOT OF BABYLON.

"...and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

And the woman was clothed around with purple and scarlet, and gilt with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand; full of the abominations and filthiness of her fornications.

And on her forehead a name was written;  
A MYSTERY: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE FORNICATIONS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.  
And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the martyrs of Jesus. And I wondered, when I had seen her with great admiration.

.... as much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her; because she saith in her heart; I sit a queen and am no widow; and sorrow I shall not see.

... she shalt be burnt with the fire; because God is strong, who shalt judge her."

(St. John's Apocalypse. Ch.17:3. Douay Bible.)

An examination of the use of fire symbolism within Catholicism, reveals an implicit misogyny. In Paganism, fire symbolism was seen as positive, regenerative and fertile; Catholicism gradually supplanted these meanings, whilst often retaining the form.

The popular idea of fire as being solely a force for destruction is probably derived from Christianity which is the foundation upon which our culture is built; Catholic concepts like Hell-fire and Apocalypse are still within our frame of reference. Fire is usually associated with punishment for sin; more specifically as a form of purification.

In a comparative study of Christianity and pre-Christianity, it becomes clear that Catholicism is based on an ideological duality, where mind and matter are seen as two distinct entities; matter 'being the source of evil.' (1)

Fire (hell fire) is used as a reminder of mortality, of putrefaction. The physical is denigrated because it corrupts; both in death as matter and spiritually because the body is the site of temptation which leads to sin and therefore, by association, to death and Hell fire.

Fire is often used to signify spiritual energy and purity as in the image of the Sacred Heart (Christ's heart surmounted by flames), or the representation of the Holy Spirit as a tongue of Fire.

Catholic mystics often used fire as a metaphor for Mystical Union with God.

"My Soul was plunged like iron into a furnace.., it left me all aflame with a great Love of God." (2)

Fire, traditionally one of the emblems of physical desire or union (see Ch.5), is used to describe a mystical union whilst the physical is denied or denigrated as concupiscence unless it is part of the function of reproduction.

As Catholicism subsumed paganism and appropriated its forms and traditions for its own use, the shift began to take place away from a more organic, cyclical culture towards a more cerebral culture. In paganism, good weather and fertility were seen as paramount; the cycle of the seasons were celebrated so that when the fields were burnt after harvesting, the ashes were ploughed back into the fields as fertiliser for the next crop as part of a religious ceremony which also blessed the fertility of the young.

Festivals like Hallowe'en, which celebrated the regenerative cycles of fertility, fecundity, the dead and the living became a ritual which symbolised the destruction of evil and was overlaid with the Feast of All Souls - a reminder of mortality. Initially in paganism, positive and negative would have been seen as forces which needed to be finely balanced; then, gradually the good/evil polarity, the ideological duality of Catholicism, became instituted, so that negative became evil/the devil, which ultimately became defined as witchcraft and paganism itself.

Within this ideological duality lies an inherent misogyny. In the polarity of mind and matter, good and evil; mind is cerebral

and therefore good, and matter is physical and therefore potentially evil. Woman is denigrated because she is seen as the embodiment of physicality and desire; she menstruates and has the ability to give birth; her body is seen as the source of temptations of the flesh, of sin, especially if she is independent of a man's control. She is perceived as being in danger and dangerous unless under male authority, thus the concept that Man is the Head of the Church and Woman the Heart or body of the Church.

Perpetual fire for Catholics is hell fire; the ultimate fire is the Apocalypse. In St. John's Apocalypse, all the sins of the world are represented by a woman - the Great Harlot; who must be destroyed by fire, though implicitly she is fire itself, she has the ability to destroy. (see ch.5).

"She saith in her heart, I sit a queen but am no widow; and sorrow I shall not see."

She is independent and all powerful - she has the ability to destroy, an inversion of the ability to give birth/life.

The Great Harlot could well be a reference to earlier matriarchal religion where female reproduction was the central mystery.

She exists in parallel to the Greek Myths which Robert Graves saw as revenge myths on earlier matriarchal religion. (3)

For St. John, she has a sexual power over men, she is a force of evil and destruction. Desire is filthiness, her power must be contained by shame and repentance, yet the implication is that she will not accept these terms, so she must be destroyed.

In the duality of mind/matter - the spiritual/cerebral/intellectual/the RATIONAL is elevated and designated MALE whilst the physical/emotional are denied. WOMAN is invested with all that is repressed, with the carnal/the emotional/the intuitive/the physical and therefore, within this polarity - the IRRATIONAL.

The story of the Harlot is an ideological allegory of the struggle to control sin/desire; women and the cultural image of women. A dual image was produced, the Virgin/Whore divide, as an instrument of control.

Women, the source of evil must be contained, whilst at the same time, the 'Virgin' dimension of the manufactured image became absolutely central to both the Church's iconography and its ideological philosophy.

Woman fell from grace when she bit into the apple of knowledge. She and all women afterwards were punished with painful menstruation and childbirth, rendered unclean and placed under male dominion.(4) Within this schema, Woman is.. the devil/a fallen angel/ a menstruating woman. Her monthly cycle a reminder of her ability to create and destroy.

Under Christianity, women are alienated from their own physicality, their bodies are owned and controlled by others. We refer to our genitals as 'down there', as if they were not a part of us. Our wombs are sites of desire and fear; invested unconsciously with the ability to rob men of their power - with the ability to castrate.

It is the physical, the emotional, the intuitive that is to be purified and destroyed by hell fire; it is the sin of Eve. The Great Harlot is to be destroyed by hell fire, but she is fire itself; she has the ability to destroy. In the good/evil, male/female, heaven /hell divide, the female and hell are both 'down there'. Hell is a womb. (5)

## 3. Fire Ritual and Paganism.

BRIGIT/BRIDE/BRIDGET.

Celtic Goddess of fertility and fire and poetry.  
 "Bridget was born at sunrise neither within nor without a house, was bathed in milk, her breath revives the dead, a house in which she is staying flames up to heaven, cow dung blazes before her, oil is poured on her head; she is fed from the milk of a white red-eared cow; a fiery pillar rises over her head; sun rays support her wet cloak; she remains a virgin; and she was one of the mothers of Christ the anointed. She has, according to Giraldus Cambrensis, a perpetual ashless fire watched by twenty nuns, of whom, herself was one, blown by fans and bellows only, and surrounded by a hedge within which no male could enter.

(Whitley Stokes quoting earlier sources in 'Three Middle Irish Homilies' as quoted in 'A Literary History of Ireland' by Douglas Hyde.)

Much of the existing historical documentation of fire ritual and customs in paganism was supplied by Christian monks and priests. It often illustrates the transition from paganism to Christianity and the consequent confusion of images and ideologies.

Evidence of pagan ritual bonfires and fire related customs can be traced back to the middle ages but 'their analogy to similar customs observed in Antiquity goes with strong internal evidence to prove that their origin must be sought in a period long prior to the spread of Christianity.' (6)

The earliest proof of their observance in Central Europe is supplied by the attempts made by the Christian synods in the 8th century to put them down as 'heathenish' practises. Paganism is a general term which covers all pre christian religions. ('heathenism' and 'paganism' both originate as terms of abuse to describe people who were not yet converted to Christianity.)

Implicit within the shift from paganism to Christianity was a move away from women centred religion/mythologies which used fire ritual to the same rituals being eventually used against women.

In Ireland, the terms 'Brigit' and 'goddess' were once synonymous. Brigit was a triple goddess; Brigit of poetry, Brigit of healing and Brigit of smithcraft. The name Brigit is thought to derive from the gaelic 'breo-shaighit' - fiery arrow, 'as though the inspirations of a poet pierced like fiery arrows' (7.) Brigit was a muse in an active primary sense rather than the passive understanding we have of the word today. Her Aegean prototype seems to have been Brizo, the meaning of which was derived from the greek 'brizein' - to enchant. (8). Her cult bears many similarities to that of Vesta - the Roman Goddess of fire. (see chapter 4.) Both have a perpetual fire tended by women from which men were excluded, here they are called nuns, at Vesta's temple they were the Vestal Virgins. The text I have quoted from, which is of indeterminate origin,

already bears the marks of Christianity. Brigit and the Virgin Mary are combined. Brigit and later, St. Bridget were often called 'Mary of the Gael'. St. Bridget acquired many of the qualities of the pagan Brigit; she is held to be the patron saint of healing and of poets and a school of metalwork was set up by her around the year 525 in Kildare in Ireland.

The later customs evident in Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Highlands, of the Queen of the May, the May Bride and St. Bridget's day were very probably celebrations of spring offered up to the older goddess Brigit.

There are many variations in the celebrations, in one from the Shetlands 'the women take a sheaf of oats, and dress it up in women's apparel, put it in a large basket and lay a wooden club by it and this they call Briid's bed. At night they call "Briid is come, Briid is welcome" three times. In the morning they look among the ashes expecting to see the impression of Briid's club there; which they would see as an omen for the coming year - a blessing of fertility and the crops.' (9).

Generally speaking pagan fire rituals were related to fertility both of the people and the crops. The more bonfires that could be seen burning in the night, the more fruitful would be the coming year. The fires were lit on the highest hills, the better to be seen for miles around.

Ritual significance was placed on the actual lighting of the fire, often they were started by rubbing two twigs together or the last person married in the village was charged with lighting the fire. Commonly, young people leapt through the embers or all the couples married in that year would dance around the fire. The cattle were driven through the embers; the ashes mixed with drinking water for the animals to protect them from plague. Ashes were scattered over the fields and fruit trees and placed in the nests of the poultry as a charm to ensure fertility.

(For an elaboration on the connection between fire and fertility see chapter 5.)

Hallowe'en, the feast of all Souls (the Eve of All Saints or All Hallow), was the time to clean out the hearth and lay a new fire as a way of leaving the past behind and greeting the coming year. The end of October marks the transition from autumn into winter; the souls of the departed were supposed to re-visit their old homes to warm themselves by the fire and to comfort themselves in the good cheer provided in the kitchen or parlour of their kinsfolk. In pre-Christian celtic cultures (including England), it was also believed to be the time that witches, fairies and hobgoblins went speeding on their way on their errands of mischief. (10)

It was a time of divination which took many forms, one of which was pyromancy - divination by means of fire or flames.

According to Mary Daly, it was mainly practised by women who spent more time at the hearth 'and knew the significance of fire as a source of light and heat and a symbol of energy, passion and courage.' (11).

Pagan fire rituals serve as pointers to a complex, multi-layered philosophy. Fire must have served as a metaphor for human life, with each stage in the process given equal importance. From rubbing the twigs to make the fire, to dancing around the fire at its brightest; jumping over the embers or driving the cattle through; using the embers and ashes to scatter across crops etc..

Fertility was blessed and the souls of the dead welcomed at the same time; predictions for the coming year made and the past laid to rest; cycles of the life of the fire, the seasons and human life all existing equally and eternally. Paganism seems to embody a philosophical humbleness which must have been frail when faced with the ideological duality of Christianity. On the simplest level, fire must have been of primary importance for material reasons, for cooking and light and warmth; but within a holistic philosophy these elements must also have a spiritual metaphysical resonance .

In mediaeval Europe, the major fire festivals took place at easter. In existing documents Catholicism and paganism are entwined: in France, a straw man was burned and tried for all the thefts of the village, the villagers dance around the pyre and the last bride leapt over. In another variation, an effigy representing the tree spirit is paraded through the streets, surrounded by figures dressed as judges and magistrates and a figure for Lent, with young people dressed as mourners. The effigy is tried and sentenced amidst the cries of the people. Often a pretense was made of burning a real person, there are grounds for believing that anciently human beings were actually burnt. (12) The effigy usually represented the spirit of the carnival- the tree spirit or spirit of the corn which was burnt on Ash Wednesday. Tree symbolism was thought to be so important because it was said that trees capture fire in the form of lightening when it fell from the heavens. Pieces of twig or wood from the bonfire was taken home to bless the household or latterly they returned to the bonfire on Easter Monday to gather the ashes and collect palm branches which had been blessed on Palm Sunday. The palm branches were planted and the ashes scattered in the fields - as protection from harm and a blessing on the crops.

The etymology of the word 'carne'-ival (13), suggests an offering of flesh; sometimes the corn spirit was represented by a pig who is eaten on Ash Wednesday, Shrove Tuesday or Candlemas. The bones were placed among the ashes and exchanged as gifts with neighbours.

Often the figure burned was called 'the witch', who would initially have been an undifferentiated element like the tree spirit or the spirit of the corn.

The ceremony was sometimes called 'carrying out death' - a ritual to take away any source of harm from the crops; to prevent thunder, hail, storm and lightening.

The word 'witch' has the same etymological root as 'wick' - a wick or match. The dictionary definition of wick was originally, "a number of threads of cotton or some similar substance, loosely twisted into a string, round which wax and tallow is applied by means of melting or running into a mold and thus form a candle or torch. The primary sense of 'witch' was - 'to wind and turn, or to depart, to fall away.' (14) It seems probable that originally the 'witch' was the element that ignited the fire; that a wick became ritually important and gradually became more central and became an effigy- a spirit of good, of light and of fertility. Lightening striking a tree was seen as a sacred mystery which once gave humankind the gift of fire. The 'witch' lighting the fire is a human symbolisation of the mystery; a homage is used both as a blessing of fertility and as a protection against possible harm caused by thunder and lightening, so that lighting the fire is in essence a ritual which operates in the same way

as homœopathic medicine, of 'similia similibus curatur' - like curing like.

It seems likely that with the transition to Christianity; the term 'witch' began to be applied to those people who practised healing or 'magic' by means of homœopathy or herbalism, and gradually came to mean 'evil in principle or practise, deviating from divine law, addicted to vice; sinful, immoral etc.., (15) This interpretation of the word was initially designated male.

The popular interpretation of 'witch' as feminine would seem to have been introduced with the Christian association of sexuality with women and sexuality as source of evil. 'To bewitch', for example is popularly understood as a sexual power a woman might have over a man. Similarly the shift in meaning which has occurred with the word 'muse' from active to passive or the 'trivialisation' of the word 'enchant'. (The word 'trivia' is in itself a 'trivialisation'. Etymologically it can be broken down to - the meeting of three roads. A sacred place- a meeting of the Triple Goddess in her three elements- wisdom in other words.) These transitions in meaning parallel the shift described in Chapter 2 from matriarchal religion to Christianity in the story of the Harlot of Babylon.

Elements of pagan fire festivals are still evident in the Catholic Canon; but the celebration of life and fertility have become reminders of putrefaction and death. The corn spirit is still apparent in the practise of palms of Palm Sunday; the giving of St. Bridget's Cross to bless the household and the making of corn dollies which originate as effigies to quicken the corn and appease the corn spirit; perhaps most centrally the tree spirit has become the cross on which Christ is crucified.

On Ash Wednesday, a smear of ash is placed on the head of Catholics as a reminder of their mortality. 'Remember Man, dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return.' Ash as a fertility symbol has completely disappeared. One ritual which remains unchanged is the idea of new fire for the new year; all the lights in the church are extinguished and a new fire is made; at this fire, the paschal candle or Easter Candle is then used to rekindle all the extinguished lights in the church.

In many ways, Christian documentors present paganism as a negative of Christianity, yet a double reversal has taken place; in mirroring paganism, Christianity also negated its meaning. St. Bridget could be seen as an example of this. St. Bridget is an Irish saint, popularly thought of as the Irish Virgin Mary. With time she has taken on all the qualities of Brigid- the Celtic Goddess of fire, fertility and poetry. St. Bridget's Crosses are still blessed and exchanged at Easter; though the 'cross' woven in celtic form actually resembles a celtic wheel or fire wheel more than it does a cross. (16.) The custom goes back to Antiquity and has its meaning there as part of the homage to the Triple Goddess. The pious virgin saint is but a pale shadow of a rich divinity.

In researching the documentation of fire rituals and customs the outline of an holistic, metaphysical philosophy becomes clearer. Whilst the 'spark' of life-fertility and regeneration lie at the centre as divine mystery; glimpses of a coherent matriarchal religion have already been overlaid with Christian ideology. 'Paganism' serves as a link between Christianity and the earlier matriarchal religions which I will outline in some detail in the next chapter.

-ment of their vows. Terra cotta lamps were lit as perpetual fires as a prayer for the safety of their families, the vestals made sure they stayed alight. Votive offerings in the form of parts of the body which were diseased were represented in Terra cotta and offered up to the Goddess to be healed.

A feast was offered up by the young people who went there for a purificatory ceremony in her honour; cakes were served piping hot on plates of leaves and apples were offered still hanging in clusters on the bough. In pre-Christian times, the apple tree represented immortality through wisdom. (20).

The fire was fueled with leaves, wood and twigs from an oak tree which was deemed sacred. It was popularly thought that when fire fell from the heavens it was caught in an oak tree.

In May, a purification ceremony took place which was probably an ancestor of the pagan fire festivals. In the months preceding May it was considered unlucky to get married, many marriages took place afterwards and May is still one of the traditional times to get married. In the ceremony, puppets made of rushes, or wooden effigies or scarecrows were hung outside houses and collected by the Vestals who burnt them or threw them in the river; They were designed to divert demons away from the people, from the houses, from the city. The ceremony was considered complete when the puppets and the ashes from Vesta's old fire were finally swept out to sea.

The Vestal Virgins were the matriachal priestesses at the Temple of Vesta. They officiated over all the important ceremonies in the community throughout the year.

Their 'virginity' would have been seen as a symbol of spiritual intensity, but they were not virgins as we understand the word today, the title referred to their independent status.

According to Robert Graves "it is the commonplace paradox of religions that nothing is unlawful, that is not also lawful, on particularly holy occasion." (21). The festivals of Midsummer and New Year would have been such occasions. Future kings were born of the Vestals after the festivals, when orgies took place in darkness so that no man could lay claim to parentage, though it is probable that the connection between sex and childbirth had not fully been made.

That they should be Virgins in the sense in which we understand it today became institutionalised as part of the general switchover from Matriarchy to Patriarchy; it was a way of gaining male power, a way of controlling heirs to the throne. (22).

As the priestesses became marginalised and controlled by men (the kings), virginity was imposed and their hair was cut.

The sacredness of hair is almost universal and most cultures have mythologies surrounding its symbolic importance.

To cut the hair of the Vestals would have been seen as another way to take away their power which was believed to reside in their hair. Later, in the Middle Ages, the hair of witches was cut before they were burnt for the same reason.

The shorn tresses of the Vestal Virgins were hung like trophies from an ancient lotus tree; the novice nun's hair is cut before she becomes a bride of Christ. The hair of nuns and Vestal Virgins was cut for basically the same reason; ostensibly because they had given up worldly vanity or glamour (23) and an active expression of their sexuality, but another interpretation would be that the cutting of hair, like the imposition of virginity was a form of control and marginalisation of their power. Initially by reducing their real and actual power to their sexuality and then by either denying or further controlling any expression of that sexuality.

Under the guise of a rejection of materialism in the service of a higher and separated off spirituality, older more holistic beliefs were finally repressed.

11.  
Traces of this earlier matriarchal religion are still apparent within Catholicism today; Catholicism built itself on earlier pagan and Matriarchal religious systems, incorporating the symbols and rituals whilst changing the meaning. It wasn't until Protestantism that these symbols and rituals were finally 'rationalised' and omitted altogether.(24.)

Our tradition of nuns seems to be a pale shadow of the Vestal Virgin archetype, the temple of Vesta in Rome was converted to a Cathedral to the Virgin Mary in the 6/7 century A.D.

In the matrilineal pre-Christian system, future kings were born of 'virgins', as Christ was born of a Virgin, the important difference in belief being that he is seen as the son of a male God rather than a parthenogenic.(25.)

The main feast day of Vesta was in August.

" On the 13th of August at the hottest time of the year, her grove shone with a multitude of torches, whose ruddy glares was reflected in the Lake; and throughout the length and breadth of Italy, the day was kept with holy rites at every domestic hearth."(26).

In the Middle Ages the Feast of the Mother Goddess Vesta or Diana on August the 13th was converted to the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin and celebrated on August the 15th. The celebrations are still much the same though the ideology has changed.

In certain parts of Spain today, votive offerings are offered to the Virgin Mary to be healed as they were once offered to Vesta. Catholics still light candles in dedication and offer up prayers in much the same way except now the offerings are to the Virgin Mary; prayers for fertility, especially offered to her.

The use of the temple is the same, only the name of the figure-head has changed.

In Matriarchal religion, fire is literally at the centre both of religious thought and of the community; it also seems to be the core from which later pagan, then Catholic rituals spiral outwards from, meanings changing, then being lost on the journey outwards.

In a religious/philosophical belief system where the spiritual and the physical were still not differentiated, fire seems to have represented the life principle and been inextricably linked with female sexuality and fertility. It was central to every celebration within the matriarchal calendar. Fire and Vesta seem to have been interchangeable.

In a body without heat, there is no life, hence the association with life and health. The link with libido evidenced in the orgiastic fire ceremonies of Midsummer and New Year probably derive from the idea that the flame is the seed which is reproduced in each successive life; like the mystery of birth and life, it is a symbol of transformation and regeneration.

Without fire, there would be coldness, darkness, infertility, barrenness, sickness and hunger. It was women who were the guardians of both the fire and religious thought and the main practitioners of ritual practise.

In the journey outwards, 'the Mother Goddess', is at the centre; the act of giving birth, her central mystery, which would have been viewed as knowledge and therefore made it befitting that women hold a central role in the community and within religious thought.

12.  
By contemporary times, she occupies a minor position within the official Catholic doctrine as the Virgin Mary. Officially she is merely 'the vessel' that produced Christ and her main role is as intercessor between 'God' and 'his subjects'; though strategically she is used as an ideological tool as role model and form of control over women.

Yet this is belied by the importance still evidenced in the widespread prayer and ritual surrounding her, much of which has more relationship to pagan archetypes than it does to the official Catholic image and which is still mainly practised by women.

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## 5. Fire and Female Sexuality.

### PANDORA.

She is a punishment to mankind for the theft of fire from the Gods by Prometheus. She is made of clay but the four winds blow life into her and all the Goddesses adorn her. She is the embodiment of Glamour as we understand the word today. She is the original femme fatale. She opens a jar and unleashes suffering and mischief onto the world. She is a warning to men who pry into women's mysteries. (27).

In pre-Christian religion, the constant connections between fire symbolism, fertility and sexuality are so taken for granted that they are never explained. In Paganism, fire ritual is usually connected with fecundity, the young couple jump the fire to encourage their fertility, the ashes are scattered across fields and orchards; the more bonfires that could be seen, the more fruitful would be the coming year. Many of the offerings to Vesta were prayers for fertility; women walked to her shrine with burning torches in fulfillment of their vows. The association of fire with sexuality has been more subtle. In Catholicism, because sexuality is repressed, it becomes sublimated and images such as hell-fire, for example become sexualised. Catholic mystics used fire symbolism to signify spiritual union with God, though fire is more traditionally used as a poetic metaphor for physical union or desire. In Paganism, the ritual importance of the lighting of the fire could be seen to suggest sexual metaphor; two twigs are rubbed together to create fire by the last person married in the village. In the Vestal tradition, the fire festivals of New Year and Midsummer were followed by orgies. The association of women and fire in pre-Christian Roman religion is almost synonymous. Two myths of fire which pre-date paganism, one aborigine, the other South American seem finally both to make the connection explicit and to offer a key to some understanding of the origins of the connection.

The idea that fire was initially created by rubbing two twigs together is widely thought to be a myth related to sex.

"... Because nothing natural was seen to create fire, the rubbing together of two twigs was probably suggested by intimate experience. .. the lovers rub against and caress each other to excite their beloved. Love is but a fire to be transmitted. Fire is but a love whose secret is to be detected."

"To set fire to the stick by rubbing it against another takes time and patience, it is obviously a rhythmic activity; sensual pleasure is evident; there is a mild euphoria in the active rubbing or polishing of wood, that the thing exists in itself, for itself, as long as it is gentle and prolonged." (28)

Long after other methods had been devised, the bonfires in the mediaeval Fire Festivals were still ritually lit by the rubbing together of two twigs. Whether the connection would have been conscious or subliminal is obviously open to speculation.

A fire is something which can't be easily controlled, like desire one spark sets off another. Fire is often used as a metaphor to describe sex or love or passion.

"She was aflame with passion.."

"She burnt with desire"

"She was consumed by the flame of her passion". etc..

The use of fire as sexual metaphor often couples pleasure with danger and strenghtens the link in western Christian culture between sex and death. The poetic image is often used as part of a moral tale.

"Don't play with fire..,"

"He got his fingers burnt." etc..

Fire is often associated with licentious love and jokes and laughter. (29) As one person laughing ignites laughter in another.

"producing a laugh.. a great flame of laughter." (30).

Fire like good sex produces laughter.

Perhaps the most interesting myths are about the origins of fire, in them it is the women who have the secret of fire, sexuality and fire become synonymous. Both are primal myths from ancient cultures. They would have been passed on and survived as stories which pre-date the written word.

In the first, which is aborigine,

"The men had no fire and did not know how to make it, but the women did. While the men were away hunting in the bush, the women cooked their food and ate it themselves.

Just as they were finishing their meal, they saw the men returning away in the distance. As they did not wish the men to know about the fire, they hastily gathered together the ashes, which were still alight and thrust them up their vulva's, so that the men did not see it. When the men came close up they said, 'Where is the fire?', but the women replied, 'there is no fire.'" (31)

Bachalard interprets this as a myth about desire; the women's fire as a physical manifestation of their desire which they deny. (32) But whilst female desire is probably an element, this interpretation hardly explains the complexity of the myth.

The myth alludes to a secret female knowledge which the men are deliberately excluded from. This fire is not literal, it does

not burn the women, it describes a Mystery. The men know there is fire but not how it is produced; the women hide the ashes in their vulvas, it follows then, that they produce it from their vulvas; there is a clear analogy to giving birth and the mystery of human reproduction. Here, fire signifies warmth and sustenance, which is directly associated with the women, they produce life and sustain it, they can also give or withhold as they choose. The myth seems to describe the complexities of desire and sustenance, nurturance and reproduction as integrated elements of a holistic whole with women as the source.

In the second myth, which is from South America,

"He sprang upon her and seized her. He said that he would embrace her if she did not reveal the secret of fire. After several evasions, she consented to do so. She sat flat on the floor with her legs wide apart. Taking hold of the upper part of her abdomen she gave it a good shake and a ball of fire rolled out of the genital canal on the floor. This was not the fire that we know today; it would not make things boil or burn things. These properties were lost when the woman gave it up. Ajijeko said, however, that he could remedy that; so he gathered up all the bark, fruits and hot peppers which burn and with these and the woman's fire he made the fire that we now use." (33)

Again, Bachalard makes an interpretation based on female desire which is denied which seems inappropriate in this case. Surely, what is being described is an act of violence, in common with many creation myths, the fire is stolen.

The man threatens to rape the woman if she doesn't tell him the secret of fire; rather than submit she produces the fire from her womb.

But it isn't the fire that we know today. In various Greek revenge myths which deal with creation, the subject is born again from a male god. (34) Ajieko takes the woman's fire and mixes it with other things to make the fire that we know use.

What was this earlier fire which the women had?

The ball of fire rolls from her womb, it makes the same journey as her menstrual blood. In many cultures blood was sacred because it was thought to contain the soul; later on, taboos on menstruating women and cooking are almost universal. The menstruating women is kept away from the fire because she is a dangerous influence and has destructive powers, presumably the combination of blood and fire was thought to be lethal.

The taboos and restriction and later persecutions of women would seem to point to an earlier belief in the power of both woman and her menstrual blood.

This second myth could be seen as representing the power struggle between men and women. It exists in parallel to the Greek Myths which Robert Graves saw as revenge myths on earlier matriarchal religion where female reproduction was the central mystery.

The man steals the woman's power and uses it in a different way. Firstly by the control of female sexuality and fertility which is the basis of patriarchal power and the inheritance of that power and secondly, in the new use of fire as a weapon to extend and protect that power.

Blood and fire, the same colour, from the same source.

Fire and menstruation could both be seen as divine mysteries, as representing the life principle.

This fire that women keep within them makes sense if we think of it as their menses, their passion and their ability to give life. Fire as desire and fecundity and the monthly shedding

of blood as the visible link between the two. Menstruation is a time when female passion runs high, it is also a time when women can express their sexuality without issue.(35). In aborigine tribes, young women were sexually active but never bore children until after they were married, which suggests either that they had intercourse when they were menstruating or that they were so in tune with their monthly cycles that they instinctively only made love when they weren't ovulating. The taboo against menstruating women having sex seems to be another way in which womens sexuality is controlled and repressed. In her menses, she is deemed unclean yet in earlier cultures she was invested with power,(the power of her desire?) In Catholicism, it is a sin to have sex that is not for the purposes of reproduction though the rhythm method is permitted.

The menstrual cycle of a woman like the life of the fire is a complex thing, it is about life and death, both beginning and end, it is cyclical(36), organic and regenerative. As we have seen the rhythm of pre-patriarchal, pre-Christian society was also cyclical, seasonal and regenerative. In these terms, the ideological duality of Christianity, the polarities between good and evil, heaven and hell, life and death are revealed more clearly as an instrument of control, whose false divisions are fundamentally alien to women and operate at their expense.

The phoenix when it sees death draw near, builds a nest of sweet smelling wood and resins and exposes it to the full rays of the sun until it has burnt itself to ashes; another phoenix then rose up from the marrow of its bones.

The story of the phoenix or fire bird (usually identified as feminine), describes a process of regeneration which serves well as an allegory for the menstrual cycle of women.

In the big witch hunts of the 14th and 15th centuries, witches were burnt because it was believed that the power to curse or cast spells was destroyed by the flames. A witches blood must not be spilt because her power was in her blood, the fire was seen as a purification to take away that power.

Medieaval documents about the taboos and power of menstruation and of witches display striking similarities.(37) Menstruating women and independant women were seen as having the power to inflict curses. Menstrual blood and witches blood was invested with the power to curdle milk and destroy crops.

Nowadays, Menstruation is still commonly called the Curse-the curse on women for the Sin of Eve. (38) But what is now seen as an affliction, a punishment would once have been seen as a source of strength and power and earlier still as an object of reverence. A double turn seems to have taken place here, an earlier meaning of menstruation as the CURSE of Eve was probably menstruation as power, the power to INFLICT CURSES.

In the mediaeval fire festivals, cats and serpents were sometimes thrown into the fire, or enclosed in wicker and placed at the centre of the fire; the serpents wriggling to the top and the screams of the cats were celebrated by the people. Both animals were associated both with evil and with the feminine. (39). Later red squirrels and foxes were thrown into the fire as re-presentatives of the witches. Later, as hysteria grew, the witch burnings began. It was women without men, women who weren't under a male authority

who were deemed to have destructive powers. It was women who weren't controlled who were destroyed.

Nine million women were burnt.

"The inquisitors primary and ultimate perversion of pyromany was their attempt to consume female potency by a crude and violent form of pyromachy - of fighting fire with fire. They attempted to demolish once and for all, female powers of divination by burning women alive." (40).

Mary Daly talks of the bravery and courage of those women being 'unquenched by the fires of affliction.'

"Remembering in our own lives the nine million women were sacrificed during the Witchcraze in Western Europe.

Although their bodies were reduced to ashes, the spirit of the witches has survived in women as resilience and independence. Fire becomes a metaphysical symbol of womens power and energy.

According to Robert Graves, Hesiod's account of the story of Pandora is not a genuine myth (41), but an anti feminist fable, probably of his own invention. The story is based on an earlier myth of Demophon and Phyllis, where Pandora is another title for the Earth Goddess Rhea. Hesiod's account blames Pandora for mans mortality and all ills but the earlier myth was probably a warning to men who pry into women's mysteries.

In the aborigine myth; hearth and womb, fire and women, menstruation and passion are all interlinked.

In the South American myth, man steals the fire from the woman and has to re-make it.

In the story of Pandora, the fire is also stolen and something is re-made. But this time it is a re-constituted woman, fashioned according to male desire. She is divorced from her sexuality which is designated 'evil'. Under Christianity, women often refer to their genitals as 'down there' as if they were not part of us, here - womb and vagina have become a 'jar' which Pandora 'opens'. The consequences of female curiosity, as in the story of Eve are mortality, old age, labour, sickness, insanity, vice and passion.

A feminist interpretation of the Pandora story would obviously question the idea that female sexuality is a destructive force. Rather that, in the attempt to control female sexuality and fecundity, by setting up women as a fantasy of male desire and divorcing desire from the richness of its source, the consequences are bound to be destructive. Desire is alienated from the whole cycle of sustenance, menstruation, reproduction and nurturance and then pronounced corrupt.

Pandora and Eve are interchangeable, both are man made, Pandora from clay and Eve from Adams rib, both are held responsible, because of an act of curiosity, for all the ills of the world, (the frailty of human existence.)

It is in this context that nine million women were burnt alive. The witch hunters tried to extinguish what they saw as the source of female power, their menses, in the very element which is most identified with women, fire.

17.  
6. Conclusion.

A SCARLET WOMAN.

Roman courtesans wore red to signify their independence; later the wearing of red became institutionalised under Roman Law as a mark of their trade. They dyed their hair red with Henna.

Mary Magdalene, the repentant whore of the New Testament, the mirror image of the Virgin, traditionally has red hair. (In the Gnostic Gospels she is an equal disciple/teacher with Jesus, sometimes she is his lover.) (42)

In the film, *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara wears red, she refuses to submit to her husband. Everything around her is destroyed by fire.

In the film *Jezebel*, the young rebellious Bette Davis causes a scandal by wearing a red gown to a ball where all the other young virgins wear white.

In *'Wide Sargasso Sea'*, the first Mrs Rochester is 'mad' and imprisoned. In a wardrobe hangs a red dress, which holds memories of lost youth, freedom and her home, the far away West Indies. The dress catches fire, the fire spreads, the house which is her prison is destroyed. (43).

The history of mythologies is complex; yet themes emerge; fire as passion, fertility, sexuality and regeneration. In focusing on the particular - fire symbol and ritual; and looking at its manifestations throughout time and in differing cultures, it has become apparent that images which previously appeared unconnected are actually far from random.

By equating fire and passion with corrupted and repressed truths about women's sexuality I have tried to show that these images are ideological construction, produced and perpetuated for significant cultural reasons.

Concluding with the archetype of 'the scarlet woman' I can now add one more element to the equation. In the idea of the scarlet woman or the woman in red, ancient and contemporary ideologies collude and finally bring together fire AND blood as symbols of passion.

Red is the colour of fire as much as passion, as life.

Red is the colour of blood, the spark of life, the blood coursing through our veins which distinguishes us from a corpse.

Red is passion: full blooded AND fiery. Red is the colour of menstrual blood.

In Welsh, the word 'scarlet' means - an effusion from a wound. (44)

In the earlier chapters, the exploration of ancient cultures revealed the different ways in which the same images were used ideologically. A common thread emerged and is still apparent in contemporary culture, now finding expression in films, literature, stories and jokes which form the powerful ideology which surrounds us.

The association of woman with fire or hearth is still common, either as a dangerous element which must be conquered and controlled or in a completely derogatory way in jokes and colloquial phrases. In for example..

'You don't look at the mantelpiece when you're poking the fire.'

or in the joke about 'the whore who smoked so much she had a fall of soot each month.' (45).

Society doesn't produce random images, there are always reasons. The common thread running through all the material is a profound ambivalence to women which results in constant struggle to control and contain female sexuality and fertility. Woman like fire, is seen as being mysterious, uncontrolled/passionate, and therefore, dangerous and threatening.

The most extreme manifestations of the attempt to control women was by the destruction of the 9 million women in the witch burnings; a less obvious, but effective measure is to alienate women from their own sexuality and to constantly underline that alienation in terms of advertisements, films, magazines jokes etc..

Rather than a woman centred sexuality where passion and desire exist within the whole cycle of sustenance, menstruation, reproduction and nurturance; an alienated sexuality is culturally imposed; woman is seen as a receptacle or vessel for male desire, and then blamed for being 'desirable.'

It is surely no accident that Marilyn Monroe - the ultimate sex symbol in our times was completely sexually alienated from her own body, her own desires. Sexually abused as a child, in adult life she acted out a parody of male desire and became a complete victim of it. (46)

The colour red as signifier of passion permeates all levels of our society. The popular image in films and literature is of the woman in a red dress who is passionate, rebellious and independent. It is a sexual image.

The scarlet woman is a loose woman, an adulteress, a whore; she is faithless. Usually she comes to a bad end or she finally repents or succumbs to a man's control. She is seen as sexual because she represents a struggle and a conquering; if she is passionate in terms of her own desires she is seen as evil and is destroyed.

When men wear red it is usually to lend themselves authority; as part of an official or ceremonial costume it is used to signify pomp, rank and dignity. The gown or robe of a doctor of divinity or a cardinal for example. (47)

The idea of a scarlet woman also denotes GLAMOUR, a femme fatale. Like Pandora, a woman who is irresistibly and 'fatally' attractive, a woman who has the power 'to bewitch'. (Desire is concupiscence, woman is temptation, temptation is sin, the price of sin is mortality- corruption of the flesh, therefore sex= death.)

The etymology of 'glamour' is .. magic, enchantment, a spell. (48). 'the ability to cast spells, CURSE .' (49).

(The hair of witches and Vestal Virgins was cut to rid them of their glamour.) The word was in usage at the time of the witch burnings and meant witches power.

What was once perceived as real actual power has been reduced to a secondary metaphor to describe a sexual power with men.

Menstruation is commonly called THE CURSE, The term originated in the Middle Ages as an extension of the story of the Fall. Menstruation came to be seen as the curse, as an affliction, a punishment for the sin of Eve.

One of the reasons that the witches were burnt to death as opposed to any other form of death was because it was a way of avoiding drawing or spilling any blood.

A WITCHES BLOOD MUST NOT BE SPILT.

THEREIN LAY HER POWER. The blood of witches and menstrual

blood were invested with very similar powers. When nine million women were burnt, it was ostensibly to 'purify' them of the Curse, but it was also to rid them of the power to inflict curses.

The Scarlet woman is a fallen woman. She represents temptation, she has succumbed to temptation. Menstruation is one of the consequences of the Fall. Woman fell from grace when she bit into the apple of knowledge. Eve and Pandora were both 'curious', their curiosity brings punishment onto the whole of the human race. Eve and all women afterwards were Punished with painful menses and childbirth, they were rendered unclean and placed under male dominion. Menstruation is the mark of curiosity: A fall of blood: The Fall: a fallen woman. In West Indian culture, women sometimes refer to their genitals as 'divil'. (e.g. Go wash your divil.) (50). In the aetiology of Christianity woman is... A DEVIL/A FALLEN ANGEL/A MENSTRUATING WOMAN.

When the young Bette Davis wears a scarlet gown to a ball, she breaks a taboo; she refuses the garb of girls (virgins.) She is Jezebel, she has no shame. By wearing the red dress, she displays that she is rebellious, passionate, fiery and independent. She displays her womanhood, her menstruation - she is potentially fertile, sexual and passionate, she has the ability to reproduce. It is a taboo'd statement - that is why everyone stares and the dancing stops.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the phrase 'a scarlet woman' refers to the Scarlet Whore of Babylon of St. John's Revelations; the archetype of an independent, powerful, passionate and sexual woman who has no shame. (51). St. John's text bears a striking resemblance to a gnostic text written at the same time which celebrates a powerful female divinity.

"I am the whore , and the holy one....  
I am she whose wedding is great, and I have  
not taken a husband." (52)

It seems likely that matriarchal religion still had a powerful stronghold at that time that was gradually suppressed by orthodox Christianity.

It is worth noting that the phrase only came into use in the sixteenth or seventeenth century and originated as a term of abuse about the Pope or the Church of Rome. Winyard in 1648, neatly pulls out the menstrual metaphor within St. John's text, whilst vividly underscoring the misogyny contained there.

"The scarlet-whore of Babylon spawn'd it with her menstruous profluviums." (53).

Catholicism built itself on earlier pagan and matriarchal religious systems, incorporating the symbols and rituals whilst changing the meanings. St. John's is an ideological allegory which is both anti-matriarchal and misogynist; it is ironic then, that it should be used against Catholicism itself. Protestantism, under the guise of 'rationalising' what it saw as corruption, identified Catholicism with women and finally 'purified' Christianity of any references to its matriarchal or pagan origins.

20.  
In the Malleus Malificarium of 1486, which is one of the most complete records of the witchburnings; the authors, two Jesuit priests wrote that....

"Witches by their glamour could cause the male genitals to disappear."

In 1930, Sigmund Freud, in his essay of female sexuality 'Medusa's Head' wrote that...

"... the man, jealous of his father, fears that he may be deprived of that which makes him his father's rival, the precious penis. He fears castration, AND THE WOMAN'S GENITAL ESPECIALLY WHEN IT IS BLEEDING, FRIGHTENS BECAUSE IT SEEMS LIKE THE SITE OF CASTRATION."

Across five centuries little changes. Fear of 'glamour' is replaced with a fear of menstruation. The fear is of castration in both texts.

In the first text a statement of 'fact' is revealed, with time an ideological construct. By the 20th century, psychoanalysis has replaced religion, Freud offers us an interpretation of the male unconscious.

Freud's text is especially interesting because it seems to be an ideological lapse on his part which calls into question much of his writing of female sexuality. In this context his theory of the female castration complex and penis envy: where when the female realises she has no penis, she suffers a 'wound' to her narcissism and envies the male his penis; could be seen as a paranoid defence mechanism against his own fear of castration. (54).

That which is desired, is also feared. All the evidence suggests that underpinning Christianity and the idealisation of women; the law of the Father discloses a profound fear of women which is often denied yet it permeates all levels of our culture and is expressed in the constant denigration and violation of women. HELL IS A WOMB: A WOMB IS HELL.

Symbolism isn't fixed, it is used in the service of the prevailing ideology. We have seen hearth, fire and flame used as a meta-physical emblem for light and inspiration; menstruation and regeneration; life and sustenance; energy and fertility; passion, creativity, desire and transformation.

We have seen these early significations become perverted with time so that fire became used as an instrument against that which it initially celebrated.

It has been used to destroy the physical, the emotional, the intuitive. Christianity has transformed it from life to death, fertility to putrefaction, desire to concupiscence.

Yet the fundamental attraction of fire is surely a simple thing.

"A fire is a symbol of solitude, of reverie, the flames hypnotic; the hearth an invitation to repose to thought; and also, fundamentally comfort, warmth, nurturance. (55).

In post Christian symbolism, fire has come to be seen as a male symbol and a symbol of death. Male because it is seen as active and as the beginning's of 'civilisation'; in its ability to melt metal and make weapons. Fire is now perceived as destructive; as hell fire; as apocalypse - as the end of the world in a holocaust of man-made fire.

So it makes sense that it was stolen, that the man and the woman in the myth used it in different ways; because it was women who

understood the earlier meanings, it was they who tended the hearth, they who realised how important it was that the fire should not go out.

Because fire would have been protection against the cold, the damp, the wet and the dark.

This, surely, would have been an early conception of the abode of the dead, the place of departed spirits, of Hell.

(In pre-Christian culture it is most unlikely that there was any association at all, between the concept of Hell and of fire.)

It could also serve as a description of the nuclear winter. We come full circle; now Hell IS Apocalypse.

If nuclear war is not prevented, we will be plunged back into the cold, the damp, the wet and the dark.

THE END.

## NOTES TO THE TEXT.

## 2. FIRE SYMBOLISM IN CATHOLICISM.

- (1). Farrar in Early Christians 1. talking about 'Wisdom of Solomon.' quoted in OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.  
In Christianity the philosophical doctrine of mind and matter as two distinct entities is combined with the theological doctrine of two independent principle, one good and the other evil. Matter being the source of evil because it corrupts and is corruptable.
- (2) "By my side I saw an angel. He was small and very beautiful, his face radiant. In his hand he held a long spear tipped with flame. This he seemed to plunge several times into my heart, and when he drew it out it left me all aflame with a great love of God.  
CONCEPTIONS ON THE LOVE OF GOD. ST. TERESA OF AVILA.  
see also THE WAY OF PERFECTION or MEDITATIONS.
- (3) see introduction to THE GREEK MYTHS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (4) Menstruation as a consequence of the Fall is not actually mentioned in Genesis. It wasn't until the Middle Ages that the interpretation of Genesis began to incorporate menstruation as punishment or 'curse' for the sin of Eve.
- (5) Hell is also the proper name of the Goddess of the infernal regions, the ogress Hel, the Prosperine of Scandinavian mythology. OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.

## 3. FIRE RITUAL AND PAGANISM.

- (6) THE GOLDEN BOUGH. RONALD FRAZER.
- (7) quoted in A LITERARY HISTORY OF IRELAND. From CORMAC'S GLOSSARY - a compilation of 9th and 10th century expressions many of pagan origin.
- (8) THE WHITE GODDESS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (9) THE GOLDEN BOUGH. RONALD FRAZER.
- (10) " " " " "
- (11) see PURE LUST. MARY DALY.
- (12) THE GOLDEN BOUGH.
- (13) etm., 'carne levare' meaning 'the putting away or removal of flesh (as food)., the name being originally proper to the Eve of Ash Wednesday. OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.
- (14) OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.
- (15) " " "
- (16) In some traditions the cross is a symbol of fire- the two arms associated with the kindling sticks which 'primitive' man rubbed together to produce fire. JUNG quoted by J.E. CIRLOT. A DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS.

In the pagan fire festivals, wheels of fire were rolled down hillsides. Fire wheels were sometimes used to start bonfires. It is possible that St. Bridget's Cross was originally a 'witch' in the primary sense mentioned earlier. There would seem to be a link to the Catherine Wheel. Catherine of Alexandria, a third century Catholic martyr was tortured on a wheel (four wheels with knives and teeth turning in different directions.) The Catherine wheel is a fire work which rotates while burning. The pagan fire wheel is here used as a form of torture. As a firework, it is popular on Guy Fawkes night, the big anti Catholic ceremony which coincides with the same time of year as some of the pagan fire festivals.

#### 4. FIRE RITUAL AND MATRIARCHAL RELIGION.

- (17) see introduction to THE GREEK MYTHS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (18) THE GREEK MYTHS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (19) THE GOLDEN BOUGH. RONALD FRAZER.
- (20) THE WHITE GODDESS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (21) " " " " "  
The same probably applied to the 'nuns' who tended Brigid's fire. According to Robert Graves, many of the early orders of nuns gayly reverted to paganism until they were more rigidly controlled.
- (22) THE WHITE GODDESS. ROBERT GRAVES.
- (23) see also GYN/ECOLOGY. MARY DALY. on glamour and 'bewitch' Chapter 3. The opening paragraph about Brigid graphically illustrates the confusion between nuns and vestal virgins.
- (24) see note (16) for the way in which Protestantism further perverted paganism and used it as a tool against Catholicism.
- (25) See opening paragraph on Brigid (P.5) the Virgin, where she is identified as one of the two mothers of Christ the Anointed.
- (26) THE GOLDEN BOUGH. RONALD FRAZER.

#### FIRE AND FEMALE SEXUALITY.

- (27) GREEK MYTHS . ROBERT GRAVES.
- (28) PSYCHOANALYSIS OF FIRE. GASTON BACHALARD.
- (29) " " " " "
- (30) MILOS KUNDERA. THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING quoting ANNIE LE CLREC. WOMANS WORD.
- (31) THE ORIGIN OF FIRE. RONALD FRAZER.
- (32) see PSYCHOANALYSIS OF FIRE . GASTON BACHALARD.
- (33) THE ORIGIN OF FIRE. RONALD FRAZER.

- (34) see GREEK MYTHS. Athena is born again from the head of Zeus. Hercules is reborn from his thigh. i.e., reborn of male intellect and strength/libido respectively.
- (35) THE WISE WOUND. PENELOPE SHUTTLE AND PETER REDGROVE.
- (36) In 'primitive' culture, the fire must not go out; it is kindled, lit, full fire blazes, embers, ashes, then the cycle returns.
- (37) see WISE WOUND PENELOPE SHUTTLE AND PETER REDGROVE.
- (38) see chapter 2. Catholicism and Fire.
- (39) The snake is associated with women because it sheds its skin periodically like women shed menstrual blood. In Gnostic texts, the snake is associated with female knowledge which throws a new light on the story of Eve. See THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY.
- (40) PURE LUST. MARY DALY.
- (41) GREEK MYTHS. ROBERT GRAVES.

## 5. CONCLUSION.

- (42) See THE Gnostic GOSPELS. ELAINE PAGELS. or THE WILD GIRL. MICHELLE ROBERTS which is a fictionalized account of Mary Magdalene based on Gnostic texts which makes good use of fire symbolism and the symbolism of the colour red. "The fire is like my heart, red and angry with a longing and a need which would not die down, and every minute that passed added some fresh fuel of desolation to the flames."
- (43) WIDE SARGASSO SEA. JEAN RHYS. taken from Jane Eyre, written from the point of view of the first Mrs Rochester. "... as soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. ... The smell that came from the dress was very faint at first then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and fragipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime tree when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain. ... I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire. .. I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire has spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember quite soon now.
- (44) etm., from the welsh. ysgarlad. WEBSTERS DICTIONARY.
- (45) quoted in THE WISE WOUND. PENELOPE SHUTTLE AND PETER REDGROVE.
- (46) MARILYN. GLORIA STEINAM.
- (47) OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. also given the association of women with foxes in the witch hunts, it is worth noting the scarlet coat worn in fox hunting.
- (48) OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.

- (49) GYN/ECOLOGY. MARY DALY.
- (50) THE WISE WOUND. PENELOPE SHUTTLE AND PETER REDGROVE.
- (51) OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. for text in full see p.2.  
opening text in Catholicism and Fire.
- (52) 'Thunder Perfect Mind'. THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY.  
or see THE GNOSTIC GOSPELS. ELAINE PAGELS for an  
introduction.
- (53) quoted in OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. see also note (16)  
on the identification of Catholicism with Paganism.
- (54) see FREUD. THREE ESSAYS ON SEXUALITY. STUDIES ON  
HYSTERIA or PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM. JULIET MITCHELL.
- (55) PSYCHOANALYSIS OF FIRE. GASTON BACHALARD.