The Divine Masquerade
— A Psychoanalytic Theory about the Play of Gender in Religion —

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The argument I am advancing in this lecture is composed of three interlocking parts: the first is a methodological reflection about the relationship of psychoanalysis and religion; the second is a discussion about gender and religion in the context of Freud's theory of theism followed by an update inspired by the work of Nancy Chodorow; and the third is an application of Melanic Klein's concepts of envy and jealousy to traditional religions and the contemporary women's spirituality movement.[1)]

I use psychoanalytic theories as tools to explore a question that has stirred my curiosity since the early seventies; namely, why - that is, to what end - do the world's dominant religious systems trumpet masculinity? Psychoanalytic ideas help me frame some responses. Recently, I have come to understand that the psychoanalytic concepts with which I like to think my seemingly untraditional thoughts are derived from a religious matrix of discourse and tradition. I find precedent for this understanding in

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1) For further elaboration of the hypothesis about gender presented here please see my essay "A Theory of Gender as a Central Hermeneutic in the Psychoanalyis of Religion," in Jacob van Belzen (ed), *Hermeneutic Approaches in Psychology of Religion* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1997), pp.51-64.

Freud's early work.

In 1901 while discussing the psychological roots of superstition and paranoia in The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud writes "The differences between myself and the superstitious person are two: first, he projects outwards a motivation which I look for within; secondly, he interprets chance as due to an event while I trace it back to a thought. But what is hidden from him corresponds to what is unconscious for me, and the compulsion not to let chance count as chance but to interpret it is common to both of us. ... Because the superstitious person knows nothing of the motivation of his own chance actions, and because the fact of this motivation Presses for a place in his field of recognitions he is forced to allocate its by displacements to the external world. If such a connection exists, it can hardly be limited to this single application. In point of fact I believe that a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions, is nothing but psychology projected into the external world. The obscure recognition ... of psychical factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored ···· in the construction of a supernatural reality, which is destined to be changed back once more by science into the psychology of the unconscious. One could venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to transform metaphysics into metapsychology. The gap between the paranoiac's displacement and that of the superstitious person is less wide than it appears at first sight."[2)]

This rich, complex statement intrigues me: like the very large

2) Sigmund Freud, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," in James Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), vol. VI (1901), pp.258-259 (In subsequent references, SE will refer to the standard edition.)

crystal ball on display in Washington at the Smithsonian, the passage becomes deeper and more layered as I look at it. I read it for clues about understanding the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion and sometimes catch glimpses of future theory in the psychology of religion. Formerly, I saw these remarks as prefiguring Freud's 1927 argument about religion in The Future of an Illusion - namely, that religious ideas would be rendered untenable when psychoanalysis revealed their 'true' psychological roots. I still would defend this reading of his earlier text. However, now such an interpretation lacks resonance for me. The passage suggests other more interesting directions for theory.

I now read Freud's statement as indicating that the gap between psychoanalysis and religion is "less wide than it appears at first sight." Although the similarity Freud specifies explicitly is between paranoia and superstition, his text describes a kinship between metaphysics and metapsychology. He portrays religion as an ancestor of science. As a descendant of "the mythological view of the world," his science interprets religious ideas about deity, eschatology, morality and mortality. The older system derives these constructs from an external source; while the more recent "psychology of the unconscious" traces them back to internal origins. The future superseding of religion by science is thus seen as an eclipse of one notion of topography by another. Psychoanalysis replaces religion in a progression of epistemologies as one discourse cedes its explanatory power to its younger offspring.

This reading of the 1901 text imputes to Freud awareness that, in regard to religion, he was engaged in a struggle more about language than about what he thought might be 'really real.' Such an interpretation encourages me to attend to similarities between psychoanalysis and religion. Instead of seeing psychoanalyis as the ultimate literalization of religious categories, I now see it as a reform

movement arising out of larger social and ideological matrices growing out of Judaism and Christianity. Religion is the source of psychoanalyis, which, as a related discourse, takes on the traditional so-called spiritual projects of conferring meaning and dispensing healing.

I count myself among those for whom psychoanalyis offers a fairly sustainable fiction of truth. Others find their hospitable hermeneutics in more established religious forms. One of the many characteristics that proponents of both psychoanalysis and religion share is an inclination to locate principles of their favored system of narration in a sphere that Mikhail Bakhtin once called "beyond the social." Religious ideology about the eternal, magical nature of deities and the universal relevance of sacred texts is paralleled by psychoanalytic faith in such entities as instincts and complexes. In his 1927 critique of Freudianism (often attributed to Voloshinov), Bakhtin describes Freud's work as typical of what he terms "modern trends" : he writes that "A sui generis fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical, a search for this world precisely in the depths of the organic - these are the features that pervade all systems of contemporary philosophy ····99[3)]

Bakhtin's critique of psychoanalysis still has relevance. I think it fair to say that much of Freudian and post-Freudian thought (with the notable exception of the Lacanian branches) has tended to claim a truth that trancends language and social circumstance. Although object relations theory pushes psychoanalysis in the direction of taking better account of the social environment, sociological perspectives have not yet had an appreciable influence. Object

3) V.N.Volosinov, *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* I. R. Titunink (trans.) (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976), p, 14. For an explanation of why Bakhtin should be considered the author of this critique of Freud please see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass., : Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.146-185.

relations theory tends to consider the world from a baby's point of view: the individual mother is foregrounded to such a degree that complexities of the larger, cultural milieu are often obscured.

Bakhtin presents a challenge to those of us who use psychoanalytic theory in our work. His critique urges us to resist the Freudian inclination to construct models that abstract human beings from culture and collectivity. This is a difficult goal - one that perhaps is possible to realize only intermittently.

Two concepts that I find useful in developing theory that situates psychoanalytic thought about religion in a social field are performance and performativity. Judith Butler has made a significant contribution to several disciplines by stimulating interest in these ideas and deploying them effectively in her work on gender. In reference to acts of speech, Butler writes "... a performative [action] succeeds ... only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authoritative set of practices. What this means, then, is that a performative 'works' to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force."[4] I think that the doctrines and practices of religious traditions operate analogously to the speech acts that Butler theorizes. Her work encourages me to think of religion in terms of sustained, elaborate and repeated social performances that derive power and authority from continued citation of texts, rituals and institutions.

The frequent and ubiquitous repetition and re-enactment of scriptures, rites, prayers and parables as well as the replication and reinterpretation of sacred stories and dramas in literature, film,

4) Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*(New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.226-227.

theater, architecture and visual art give what we term the "great traditions" an enormous force of historicity. What might have begun long ago within the psyches, politics and histories of particular people in specific circumstances has now accumulated as a dense sediment produced and maintained by seemingly infinite individual and institutional reiteration and recitation.

The cultural precipitate of these performances is material for the construction of what we term our individual psychologies. In other words, in reference to Bakhtin's phrase – our psyches can only be of the social, or, within the social, and not (except in fantasy) "beyond the social." Our active recitations and performances of the central discourses of our culture construct our sense of self and identity. But our passives sentient presence within the collective structures of language and symbol has profound influence as well. There is no way to refrain from participating in the world's dominant dramas. We can not exit the theater, walk off the stage, leave the church, quit analysis, or bend our genders without fashioning ourselves in response to that which we disavow.

Whether we oppose or reinterpret, in some sensor we always incorporate what we were as building material for what we are becoming. Furthermore, others will perpetually interpret our innovations within existing discursive structures. Thus Mary Daly remains a theologian no matter how much she might protest.

While there is no clean way out of the worlds produced by continual citation and performance, these worlds do change. No discourser institution or cultural practice is fixed. Because the seemingly monolithic systems which contain us are maintained by repetitive performances, they are forever vulnerable, forever in flux. The Greek deities were right never to overlook or forgive the omission of a sacrifice. They knew that their immortality depended on the fickle attentions of mortals.

Change is inevitable because institutions and language systems are rife with contradictions, lapses, ambiguities and inequalities. From time to time, groups or individuals that are uncomfortable within a discursive framework consciously set about altering it. I think both Freud and Jung did this in different ways with both religion and medicine, a discipline with religious origins. Both men successfully modified existing structures to create newer institutions concerned with dispensing healing and conferring meaning. The novelty of their innovations has both collective and individual consequence: human subjectivity changes under the influence of Freudian and Jungian theories and therapies.

Likewise, feminists are modifying religion by challenging the usual performances and citations with variations on both gestures and scripts. Whether by founding our own systems of belief or by redesigning existing institutions, we women are expanding the discursive range of religions by improvising on the traditional themes of ritual, deity and sacred text. I used to confidently quote Audre Lorde's famous line as an apt description of feminist reform: "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[5] Now I wonder: what else but the master's tools could ever take apart his house? And further, perhaps we should consider the dismantling a form of or a prelude to renovation.

These reflections apply to my work. Both psychoanalytic and feminist discourse arise out of a cultural matrix shaped by Jewish and Christian forms of thought. I consider three terms that are necessary for my current project - gender, envy and jealousy - to derive from religious frameworks.

More specifically, gender, that is, the social practice of dividing human beings into two categories - male and female - to which

5) Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider* (Trumansburg, N. Y.: Crossing Press, 1984), p.123

everyone is obliged to relate, is rooted in religious ideation. I share the opinion of the anthropologist Howard Eilberg-Schwartz who writes that f'... gender is not just another subject that intersects with religions but is central to the work that religion accomplishes ..."[6] Moreover, I want to push 11 Schwartz' insight further: while religion does intensify and even produce gendered behavior, so too does gender encourage and perhaps even necessitate religious behavior in a mutually reinforcing cycle of performance and citation. Stated more precisely, I want to argue that theism is a result of the sustained practice of gender. At present, I am going to restrict the argument to Western forms of theism, although I suspect the hypothesis is relevant in other contexts as well.

Like the concept of gender, I also understand the Kleinian terms "envy" and "jealousy" to be embedded in a hermeneutic circle involving religious discourse. Envy and jealousy can be considered derivatives of aggressive aspects of religious sensibility: envious and jealous deities had been modeling and reflecting human behavior for millenia before Melanie Klein described the behaviors in psychoanalytic terms. Secular institutions built around tribalism and competition incarnate envy and jealousy in secular spheres. Thus, Klein's theory appropriates for psychoanalysis patterns of thought and feeling that are already central to our cultural structures. She renames the gods and moves their shrines to a neighboring temenos.

Consequently, to conclude this reflection on methodology, I consider feminist and psychoanalytic concepts to have been forged from religious substance. These hermeneutic tools tend to construct variations of religious ideas. Thus, although a feminist or psychoanalytic approach to religion may promote a political, critical distance from religious institutions, it can not radically depart from

6) Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.5.

religious frameworks of thought. Rather, at the most, an inquiry like this project I am calling "the divine masquerade" can help us pay closer attention to the enduring structures that enable us to think and imagine.

That religion is a gendered phenomenon is a central premise of Freud's theory about theism. In Totem and Taboo, his famous 1913 account of the origins of religion, gender is a primary, though unstated focus. The last sentence of the book- "Im Anfang war die Tat" - states his major premise about the male tragedy that set theism in motion: "in the beginning was the deed." The deed, as we all know, was the murder of a primal father by a horde of primal brothers who wanted access to the women of the tribe. In Freud's account, religion is a system that codifies and channels men's ambivalent reactions to the killing of the father. Recurring rituals of feasting and permissiveness indicate feelings of joy related to the patriarch's demise; while remorse is expressed by placing stringent restrictions around whatever is closely associated with the father's reign. Most significant religious phenomena result from vacillation between emotional polarities of triumph and regret: "in the course of the later development of religions," Freud writes, "the two driving factors, the son's sense of guilt and the son's rebelliousness never became extinct."[7]

If we place Moses and Monotheism, written in 1939, alongside Totem and Taboo, we see that this subsequent work continues the story about the father and his sons. For example, Freud alleges that Moses was killed by "his Jewish people" and that this event becomes "an important link between the forgotten event of primeaval times and its later emergence in the form of the monotheist religions."[8] To him, Judaism and Christianity form a

7) Freud, SE XIII (1913), p.152
8) Freud, SE Xxlll (1939), p.89

single tradition characterized by its preoccupation with the paternal revenant. Freud says "there is a piece of historical truth in Christ's resurrection, for he was the resurrected Moses and behind him the returned primal father of the primitive horde, transfigured and, as the son, put in the place of the father.[9]"

Freud is firm in his insistence that the sons' murder of the father is the basis of religion. He upbraids "philosophers" who, he says, "think they can rescue the God of religion by replacing him by an impersonal, shadowy and abstract principle...."[10] The father of psychoanalysis believes that people could understand religion and throw off its yoke only if they could first see God clearly, that is, as an anthropomorphic male figure.

Women do not figure prominently in Freud's version of the history of religions: at no time do female deities or leaders play an active role. Freud discounts any legend that depicts a woman as an agent of religious development: he surmises that "in the tying poetic fancies of prehistoric times, the woman, who had been the prize of battle and the temptation to murders was probably turned into the active seducer and instigator to the crime."[11]

Although, in most of his writings, Freud appears to believe that his historical conjecture reflects actual events, occasionally he admits that, like a "just-so story" his hypothesis might not be literally accurate.[12] However, even as a just-so story thats for example, purports to explain how the leopard got its spots, Freud's imaginative rendering of humanity's religious past has value as a descriptive account that emphasizes a dominant characteristic of his object of study. A hermeneutic postulate of Freud's interpretation of

9) Freud, SE Xxlll (1939), p.90
10) Freud, SE XXI (1927), p.74.
11) Freud, SE Xvlll (1921), p.136.
12) Freud, SE Xvlll (1921), p.122.

religion is that all the in his account warrants further attention.

One way to interrogate Freud's ideas about the origin of theism is to look at his work as continuous with the religious traditions he critiques. By hardly glancing at women in his chronicle of religious history, Freud repeats a religious pattern. Because he does not ask why women play such minor roles in religious scripts and performances, he constructs a theory that diminishes women yet again. In order to advance the psychoanalytic investigation of religion, it is necessary to problematize the gender disparity that Freud finds all too obvious.

I find Nancy Chodorow's work on the social construction of gender helpful in this process. In The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, Chodorow questions the seemingly 'natural' cross-cultural fact that women do most of the mothering of the world's children. Since most social scientists insist on "the social malleability of biological factors," Chodorow suggests, 6'... we must always raise as problematic any feature of social structures even if - and perhaps especially because - it seems universal."[13] Given its apparent freedom from biological determinants, religion ought to be a feature of the social structure that exhibits greater malleability than human childrearing practices. Yet, the world's recognized religious formulations are inflexible about the maleness of both their central divinities and his key disciples. It seems that, at least for the last few millenia, men have turned into gods about as predictably as women have turned into mothers.

Although this analogy might sound flippant, it is important in relation to Chodorow's analysis of the reproduction of mothering. Her thinking, I believe, can also shed light on the reproduction of religion.

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13) Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of gender* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978), p.14.

Chodorow begins her novel reading of Freudian and post- Freudian theory by offering an account of the Oedipus complex that focuses on how patterns of identification differ for girls and boys. Because women mother, that is, because women are the primary caretakers of young children, she thinks that girls have a fairly easy time identifying with the parent who nurtures them. As a girl becomes acquainted with her father, she incorporates the masculine parent in a triangle of deep emotional attachment that includes her mother who, Chodorow believes, is felt to be continuous with a female sense of self. Since girls are never required to draw a rigid boundary between themselves and their mothers, in adulthood their affections tend to oscillate between men and women.

Boys, on the other hand, are not permitted such flexibility. Chodorow emphasizes the problem presented to male children because they are asked to behave like men even though they have been put in women's care almost exclusively during the crucial years of early childhood. "... Male development," she writes "is more complicated than female because of the difficult shifts of identification a boy must make to attain his expected gender identification and gender role assumption."[14] While a girl's adult identification with her mother is continuous with her "earliest primary identification," a boy must give up his sense of being linked to his mother and become like the more distant parent, his father. For most boys, growing up means finding ways to be like their elusive fathers while being unlike their more familiar mothers.

Chodorow thinks that the extent to which men and male activities are removed from the home influences the extent to which boys are inclined to define masculinity negatively as that which is not related to women. A boy, she says, "tends to deny identification with and relationship to his mother and reject what he takes to be the

14) Chodorow, 174.

feminine world ...."[15] She sees masculinity "being presented to a boy as less available and accessible than femininity" at the same time that it is being idealized as superior. The boy is thus encouraged to repress "those qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself and devalue women and whatever he considers to be feminine."[16]

To complicate matters further, according to Chodorow's theoryl if the growing boy asserts his masculinity by denying his connection with all things female, he risks experiencing a great sense of loss and insecurity. After all, his mother (or her female surrogates) have been his bond to life itself from the time of his earliest infancy. Although he fears being too similar to women, he needs them to feel at home both in the world and in his own skin. And, since he must repress the parts of himself that he feels to be feminines his dependency on women is intense. Paradoxically, he is likely to fear and despise the female qualities he needs so much. In contrasts writes Chodorow, because girls are allowed to feel closer to the mothering capacities within themselves, they are less emotionally dependent and tend to experience adult women more realistically than boys do.

Many common ideas about women respond to men's psychological predicaments: "Given that masculinity is so elusive," she says, "it becomes important for masculine identity that certain social activities are defined as masculine and superior, and that women are believed unable to do many of the things defined as socially important."[17] Citing Karen Horney, Chodorow acknowledges the significance of "folk beliefs, legends and poems" that allow men to cope with fear and to distance themselves from women without giving them up completely. These imaginative creations, writes Horney, "ward off

15) Chodorow, 176.
16) Chodorow, 181.
17) Chodorow, 182. 38

the dread by externalizing and objectifying women: 'It is not ... that I dread her; it is that she herself is malignant, capable of any crime, a beast of prey, a vampire, a witch, insatiable in her desires ···· the very personification of what is sinister." Horney continues: "(Men) deny dread at the expense of realistic views of women. On the one handle they glorify and adore: 'There is no need for me to dread a being so wonderful, so beautiful, nay, so saintly. On the other, they disparage: 'It would be too ridiculous to dread a creature who, if you take her all rounds is such a poor thing."[18]

On the surface, religions seem to reinforce the dynamics that Chodorow and Horney identify: men use religious structures to emphasize their uniqueness and to create distance from women by doling out excessive praise or blame to females in holy stories and by commanding the genders to inhabit different spheres distinguished by separate responsibilities, clothing and ritual roles. This obsessive insistence on difference should raise suspicions.

Psychoanalysis teaches that when a fantasy is both deep and desperate (like men's assertion that they are radically dissimilar to women) it is probable that the opposite wish will be present as well. Vacillation between both poles of the wish is testimony to its importance. Chodorow and Horney call attention to the ways men construct culture to distance themselves from women, but their theories do not develop the other side of the argument. To further their work it is necessary to look for male imaginative creations that deny sex differences altogether. Religions, I believe, are such creations. They are primary cultural arenas in which men can safely pretend to be women especially in regard to matters of nurture and reproduction.

Another way to think about this idea in psychoanalytic terms is to interrogate the religious performance of maleness as one would the

18) Chodorow, 183.

manifest content of a recurring dream. Although the dream keeps saying that the struggles and victories of various male figures - Yahweh, Christ, Allah and their look- alike agents such as Moses, Paul and Mohammed - initiate everything of merit in the world - sacred children, sacred texts, commandments, laws and valued teachings - there might be a latent meaning behind the bravado. Perhaps the overstated masculinity of religious texts and institutional practices signals a displacement of its opposite - i. e. femininity. The outward unimportance of women in the world's religions might be an attempt at what Freud calls negation and Melanie Klein terms denial. Both concepts describe a refusal to recognize that upon which a subject actually depends.

A survey of Jewish and Christian themes and practices that involve gender imitation supports the assertion that an important function of Western theisms is to permit men to masquerade as women. Although each strand in the montagemust be unraveled and contextualized, I think there is value in presenting the argument in the form of a collage. Claims about the primacy of male reproductive capacities do not play themselves out precisely or discretely in our culture. Rather, they appear and reappear in a disheveled and generalized mythology of gender that is believed because it is continually performed and encountered in a variety of venues and fragmented contexts.

A few Jewish and Christian ideas relating to male fecundity and maternity are these: A male god creates human beings and everything else in the world. In one versional the god, although spoken of as male, is imaged as containing both sexes. He thus can clone himself to create both human sexes. In another versions the god creates a mantra makes him pregnant and together they give birth to a woman. Later, Christian themes continue the story: first, a male god bypasses all physical contact with a female body and

reproduces himself through a virgin. Them the male son of the same god insists that his fathers words are more important than "the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked (Luke 11:27)."

In both Judaism and Christianity, ritual activities directed by a male hierarchy continually displace women's agency and creativity. Circumcision and baptism supercede the importance of physical birth. In Judaism, the boy's reading from the Torah at his bar mitzvah both mimics and upstages the girl's initiation into her adulthood through menstruation.[19] In Catholicism, symbolic feeding from a male body during mass is infused with meaning through ritual and incantations thereby eclipsing the importance of the nursing and feeding done by women.[20] Incessant repetition of such rites reasserts the basic religious principle that men are the primary, if not the sole, agents of creation.

The rituals of androcentric religion work effective magic. Because many of our secular intellectual traditions stem from religious institutions, the primacy of male procreative power is insisted upon within secular spheres of culture. For examples some scholars suggest that the origins of Western science reveal a male interest in making women irrelevant to the important work of creation. Alchemical images seem to express a desire to bring the wonders of maternity under male control. Instead of recognizing an equitable conjunction of male and female opposites, the alchemical opus works to displace the female part in biological creation through a male-directed technology.[21] Carolyn Merchant develops this line of

19) Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds* (New York: Collier, 1962).

20) For a nuanced discussion of the importance of gender in reference to th sacrament, please see Kelley 4. Raab, "When the Priest Becomes a Woman: Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Significance of Gender for the Catholic Eucharist." Ph.D. diss. University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1990

21) Sally Allen and Joanna Hubbs, "Outrunning Atalanta: Feminine Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation," *Signs*. 6(2): pp.210-221.

thought in her work on the death of nature.[22]

In his book A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science, David Noble looks at the influence of monastic culture on medieval science. He notes that monks sometimes cultivated an ambiguous gender identity by imagining themselves as females in maternal roles. For example, in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux entreats his fellow abbots to "show affection as a mother would .... Be Gentler let your bosoms expand with milk not swell with passion." Similarly, Francis of Assisi is said to have encouraged his associates to address him as mother.[23] Noble believes that contemporary science has been influenced by the clergy's desire to make women unnecessary and to dominate the creative forces of a nature imagined to be "mother." He is not alone in suggesting that the most recent expression of this wish is men's effort to control new reproductive technologies.

The male aim to imaginatively appropriate the female role in maternity ism I believe, characterized by a contradiction: it is motivated both by men's profound need for women and by their wish for women not to exist at all. One of the reasons that Melanie Klein's dark and controversial concept of envy can be useful in addressing such an equivocal emotional phenomenon is that the theory takes account of the ambiguity that often characterizes basic human wants. I will draw on Klein's presentation of the idea in her essay titled "Envy and Gratitude" in order to show the relevance of Kleinian psychoanalytic theory to the divine masquerade. "Envy," writes Klein, "is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or spoil it."[24] She traces the etiology of envy to early

22) Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980.)

23) David Noble, *A World Without Women: The Clerical Culture of Western Science* (New York: Alfred 4. Knopf, 1992).

experiences of being fed and cared for. If these basic activities go wells foundations for the adult ability to derive satisfaction from life will be established. If infancy is troubled, however, adult experience might be forever tinged with varying shades of negativity.

In Klein's thoughts as in psychoanalytic theory in generals the perception of meaning attaches itself to early experience in the context of a person's later life. Klein believes that the satisfaction an infant derives from being well-nurtured gives rise to the "prototype of maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity, as well as creativeness." Early phantasies connected with happy memories of the fulfillment of basic needs construct "the foundation for hope, trust and a belief in goodness."[25] Because envy is seen as a primary force that erodes the capacity to take pleasure in life and find value in experience, mitigating it is a significant goal of Kleinian therapy.

Although an infant might develop aggressive feelings from frustrations that arise while she or he is trying to satisfy hungers Klein thinks the destructive wishes that characterize envy are directed toward the beloved source of nurture mainly because it is felt to be outside the baby's control. Thus, to an extent, even a good mother is hated for being both absolutely necessary for her child's well-being and completely independent of her child's will. Klein believes that as adults all of us tend to experience some degree of envy in reference to people we love and admire because we know that their beauty, wealth or talent is separate from us. Guilt about wishing to damage what we love and appreciate often accompanies our envy. In her view, we can measure our sense of peace by the degree to which we are able to enjoy goodness and success that exist apart from ourselves. "Whereas envy is a source of great

24) Melanie Klein, Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963(New York: Delacorte Press/ Seymour Lawrence, 1975). p.181

25) Klein, p.180.

unhappiness," she thinks that "relative freedom from it is felt to underlie contented and peaceful states of mind - ultimately sanity."[26]

Envy threatens to hurt that which it wants and needs most. Klein writes "there are very pertinent psychological reasons why envy ranks among the seven fdeadly sins'. I would even suggest that it is unconsciously felt to be the greatest sin of all, because it spoils and harms the good object which is the source of life." She agrees with Chaucer, who, in "The Parson's Tale", says "it is certain that envy is the worst sin that is; for all other sins are sins only against one virtues whereas envy is against all virtue and against all goodness ."[27] In a general sense, creativity can be considered to be the target of envious feelings. Klein says "though superficially ... [envy] may manifest itself as a coveting of the prestige, wealth, and power others have attained, its actual aim is creativeness. The capacity to give and to preserve life is felt as the greatest gift and therefore creativeness becomes the deepest cause for envy."[28] She thinks that both sexes envy one another; each wants "to take away the attributes of the other sex" so that creativity could be wholly within male or female control.

Klein believes that excessive envy in men extends to all feminine attributes, "in particular to the woman's capacity to bear children." In a man who is psychologically mature, "compensation for unfulfilled feminine desires" can be derived from "a good relation to his wife or lover and by becoming the father of the children she bears him ···· the feeling that he has created the child counteracts the man's early envy of the mother's femininity."[29]

The last sentence of this quotation warrants close attention: "the

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26) Klein, p.203.
27) Klein, p.189.
28) Klein, p.202.
29) Klein, p.201

feeling that he has created the child counteracts the mantis early envy of the mother's femininity." How do men come to believe that they create children? And, in a more metaphoric sense, how can they be convinced of their ability to create and nurture themselves? Since the male role in procreation is always somewhat theoretical - i. e. children do not emerge from male bodies (except in religions) - linguistic customs such as stamping mother and child with male surnames have evolved to reassure men of their utility. Initiation rituals are thought to serve a similar purpose. Anthropology is rife with theories that analyze male puberty rites in pre-literate cultures as efforts of men to take over the functions of women.[30]

Klein does not consider how cultural factors could both mitigate and exacerbate inter-gender rivalry. To bring her work into wider arenas of theory, we should think about how the exaggeration of gender difference in cultural practices might stir up the envy and aggression to which she draws our attention.

If our text-based religions are sophisticated expressions of male anxiety about procreation and dependence on women, they are not innocuous. What makes these systems problematic is that instead of mitigating the envy of femininity that Klein describes, religions aggressively diminish women in order to glorify men. Male envy is thus both denied and promoted. Please consider this hypothesis as I juxtapose religious themes that correspond to four of the mechanisms Klein identifies as defenses against envy.

Klein writes alfa frequent method of defence is to stir up envy of others by one's own success, possessions, and ···· good fortune, thereby reversing the situation in which envy is experienced.[31] I see this technique manifested in overblown praise for the power, majesty and omnipotence of male god figures. Often the claim is made that

30) Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds*_

31) Klein, p.218.

all creativity issues from male divinity. In Job, for example, God praises himself with a long inventory of his abilities and achievements in order to deflate mankind. However, in addition to privileging divinity over humanity, I read God's grandiose rhetorical questions - "such as where was thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?"(Job 38:4), "who divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder?"(Job 38:25), and "who provideth for the raven his food"(Job 38:41) as evidence of the father god's insecurity about his role as sole male creator of the world. The insistence that everything issues from the male godhead both masks and reveals the anxiety about generativity that seems basic to biblical religion.

Splitting the desired object into parts that can be separately idealized and despised is another way to cope with envy. Kleinians theorize that imagining the bad object as entirely different from the good one has the psychological goal of keeping whatever is loved safe from aggressive wishes. However, since hatred for the bad object is not allowed to be lessened by any tender feelings, splitting can encourage distorted views that lead to destructiveness.

In Judaism and Christianity, images of women tend to appear in pairs that are split: one is virtuous with a "price far above rubies" (Prov. 31:10) ; while another's "end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword" (Prov. 5:4). As stories about women unfold in the traditions, the good women tend to get better while the bad ones get worse. The case of Esther and Vashti has been cited in feminist analysts as an interesting example. Even though Queen Vashti initially does nothing more than refuse to appear before her drunken husband and his friends, she is vilified in rabbinic literature. Esther's glorification seems to require the denigration of her predecessor.[32]

32) Mary Gendler, "The Restoration of Vashti," in Elizabeth Koltun (ed.), *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976.)

Similarly, as Christian myth continues through the centuries, Mary's purity is increasingly extolled over Eve's duplicity. Mary is put forward as the Second Eve whose role is to serve as an antidote to the vileness of her ancestor. Such images encourage both sexes to think of women in terms of caricature, as beings who either embody perfection or evil. The persecution of witches is a dramatic tragedy made possible by the willingness of large numbers of people to see women in unrealistic ways.

Klein writes that the aim of envy is often "the destructive introjection" of what the subject needs. Greek myth presents us with a graphic image of this when Zeus swallows Metis, Athena's mother, and displays the ability to give birth through his head. Although the appropriation of women by men in Judaism and Christianity is usually more subtle, I think these traditions express the same envious wish that motivated Zeus. By masquerading as women in Jewish and Christian texts and rituals, men imaginatively eliminate the separate existence of women and put creativity and the capacity to nurture wholly under male control.

A serious question that arises in reference to this argument is: how do religions express women's desires? One answer to such a query could be this: on the basic level of symbol and image, contemporary mainstream religions of the world are constructed to reflect men's fantasies, not women's. Although women are often enthusiastic followers of the world's major faiths, I believe that our participation reflects a wish to be within institutions that are relevant and socially significant Women support religious performance even though the psychological content of the symbols arises out of male alienation. To use a bit of slang, in regard to religion, masculine need determines "the only game in town."

By arguing that the symbolic foundation on which religion rests is

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that of the male imitation of women, I am not arguing that this is all religion is. Religious traditions are also concerned with facets of behavior, law and social organization that have little to do with gender. Furthermore, the motives of both women and men who participate in religion are complex. Habits, customs and rituals learned in childhood carry a strong emotional valence throughout life. Religious organizations can provide a sense of order, community and psychological comfort that derive from their long standing institutional presence in human history. Many people join the clergy in order to be part of groups that are actively trying to improve the world in conjunction with a structured ideology. In addition, many members of congregations enjoy the sensuality and drama of religious services; music, pleasing architecture, and the theater of ritual can enrich both male and female lives.

Nevertheless, although I recognize the secondary gains that can accrue from religious institutions and practices, I do think that the underlying dynamic of the primary symbols of major contemporary faiths involves the male appropriation of female qualities. If I were a very ambitious theorist, I would claim the following: that religion is a result of gender; that it begins in cultures that emphasize gender discontinuity and endures as institutionalized habit; that it is a primarily male form of ideation and theater in which men imaginatively transform themselves into women; and that through religion, men lessen the pain, anxiety and narcissistic affront of feeling radically separate from their mothers.

These propositions, I suggest, can illuminate much of the phenomenology of the sacred. For instance, the goal of "transcendence" proposed by theologians might be understood as a vision that offers men an escape from the contingency of masculinity. Likewise, doctrines about an afterlife, rebirth, second birth or miraculous birth of either a holy child or a holy text could

be interpreted as expressions of male wishes to control creativity and nurture. And, religious interest in the transformation of one thing into another as well as ritual concerns about separating objects and people into categories of rigid difference could be seen as reflecting two poles of the dilemma of both being and not being male.

In recent decades, as we all known increasing numbers of women have turned to the burgeoning women's spirituality movement for spiritual sustenance. Preliminary research on contemporary religions designed by women points to three findings relevant to the divine masquerade:

One, women's religions emphasize continuity rather than disjunction. They are not based on radical separations between sacred and profane, between this world and the next, or between divine and human.

Two, furthermore, although nurture of life is an ongoing concerns there are no miraculous creation stories either of children or of texts in women's religions.

And, three, women are enhancing and elaborating images of femininity in their spiritual practices instead of inverting gendered symbols to reflect male attributes.[33]

These observations indicate that women are pursuing very different psychological goals in their spiritual groups. Perhaps the word "religion" should be reserved to describe the male ideologies that enact the verb "re-ligare," the oft-cited latin root of the term religion meaning to bind again that which has presumably been torn asunder. The term does not apply to women's spirituality groups. Rather than displaying much concern about returning from a condition of exile, these organizations are centered on elaborating

33) Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

that which is already here.

Even though women's spirituality groups are not motivated by the same basic envious passions that fuel the male constructions we call our "great traditions," I do think they express powerful, serious desire. This potent emotion can, I believe, be illumined by another Kleinian concept - namely, jealousy. For Kleinians, jealousy is less ruinous than primal envy. It strives to gain the same goods a rival or sibling possesses without hungering for the destructive incorporation of the very source of goodness. Jealousy aims at an equitable distribution of cultural and psychological treasures. Perhaps when we women imitate male behavior by constructing our own deities, spiritual organizations and rituals, we are looking to acquire a measure of the social power, prestige and self- importance that religious institutions and ideologies have accorded men. We are I think motivated by jealousy, in what we might decide is the best sense of this term.

Psychoanalytic descriptions rarely flatter the religious traditions to which they are applied. But what else can we expect from ideas that are engaged in an aggressive hermeneutic competition with parent concepts derived from religious frameworks? Such irreverence can serve a positive end: it can deflate some of the puffery infusing the gods and ideologies of contemporary culture so that there can be space for new variations to develop.