

MARY DALY AND FEMINIST TRIVIA

by Alyss Thomas

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Consider the following:

Trivia: "trifles, trivialitis, unimportant details... to be found anywhere; of little importance." (*Chambers English Dictionary*) However, remember that one of the names of the Goddess was Trivia.

"The figure of Hecate, Goddess of witches, was built upon a triangle, with faces turned in three directions... The Hecate statues were set up at the crossing of three roads, hence the name Tri via". Hence our current understanding of trivia is a reversal of its original meaning of Goddess and sacred meeting place. We also find that which is trivial or commonplace is of little worth, "for in a competitive, hierarchical society scarcity is intrinsic to 'worth'. Thus gold is more important than fresh air, and consequently we are forced to live in a world in which gold is easier to find than pure air.*

The purpose of this article is to introduce readers to Mary Daly, the writer who has discovered a wealth of information like the above, and woven it into a ravishing new fabric of reality which we can wear instead of our threadbare concepts of our Selves. Mary Daly's work is highly relevant to humanistic psychology, but relatively few people have read or heard about her.

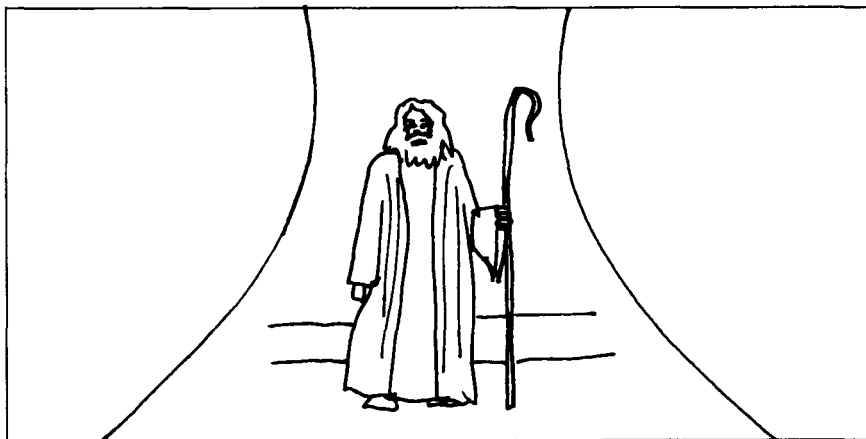
Head-Weavers

Mary Daly is a theologian, a feminist, and an associate professor at Boston College, Massachusetts. She is also a cunning arch-sleuth (stealthier than Freud and co) in detecting the whys and wiles behind our deceptively neutral everyday English, and reveals the bitter histories and deceptions that underlie the patriarchal** state. Her mould-shattering books include *Beyond God the Father*, *Gyn/Ecology*, *Pure Lust* and - recently available in an illustrated UK paperback edition - *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. This latest is a source of language and concept tools for freeing us from the mind-sets and constraints of patriarchal reality as we know it - including the 'academated fraternities of Bearded Brother No-it-alls' and The rapists. A *webster* is "a woman whose occupation is to Weave, esp. a Weaver of Words and Word-Webs." We are in need of her services in these days when militarist techno-speak is a normal feature of our daily talk.

Reading Mary Daly for the first time - especially *Gyn/Ecology* - is like having bandages removed from your eyes. You may treat the information (including extensive research into Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witchburnings, Nazi medicine and American gynecology) with fear and loathing, or with lusty delight at finally seeing connections you had always suspected were there. Mary Daly's mine is incisive and clear, and her research extensive. Her language is racy and stimulating, and she makes no apologies for using exciting Big Words, many of which she invents herself. She does not underestimate the wise intelligence of her reader. She re-presents evidence which has lain for centuries under mind- bindings and layers of crippling assumptions which have only served to alienate us from our free, wise, adventurous, creative selves. Best of all, she gives us tools to venture forth again with fresh courage and confidence. For those of us who feel a vague responsibility for examining our patriarchal values, *Gyn/Ecology* slices through all the well-meaning nonsense that has ever been said on the subject. It provides essential background information for anyone who has to deal with the *patripsych* in their work, or for anyone who does not believe that our humanity and our spirituality are repressed in the fatherland. *Gyn/Ecology* is

"for the Hag/Crone/Spinster in every living woman. It is for each individual Journeyer to decide/expand the scope of (the) imagination within her. It is she, and she alone, who can determine how far, and in what way, she will/can travel. She and she alone can dis-cover the mystery of her own history, and find out how it is interwoven with the lives of other women."*

I do not believe her 'elemental philosophy' is for women only - and I have seen men profoundly altered by reading it, with a new respect for the sacred, hearty, magical, disrespectful female in themselves and in all life.



The Patripsych - illustration from *The Barefoot Psychoanalyst* by John Southgate and Rosemary Randall, Gale Centre Publications

Spinners

The body of her work is too complex to summarise here, but a few more linguistic definitions may serve to enlighten your day. The archaic meaning of *surgeon* or *physician* was "a hanger-on who seeks advantage or gain: parasite". *Original Movement*: any movement (as a Passion, thought, word, action that proceeds from one's Original Self, that is in harmony with one's Final Cause..." *Spinster*: "A woman whose occupation is to Spin, to participate in the whirling movement of creation; one who has chosed her Self, who defines herself by choice neither in relation to children nor to men..." *Stag-nation*: "nation governed by stag parties". *Prude*: "Good, capable, brave woman endowed with Practical/passionate Wisdom... Lusty Woman who insists on the Integrity, Self-esteem and Pride of her sex..." *Psychology*: "disturbed and disturbing area of acadamentia". Plus *man- dated, anti-biotic, oldspaper, cockaludicrous, clockocracy, male-volent*, etc.

One of her main concepts is that of reversal, whereby things are dogmatically declared to be their exact opposite. This is also similar to projection, in which a quality is disowned and projected upon an external carrier. "Any Shrewd Prude can see that there is something wrong with such an expression as weapons of life."

Examples are all around us, including any attempt to diminish the elemental world with mechanistic explanations (hearts as "pumps"); penis envy as an inversion of womb envy the "creativity" of atomic science, Coca-Cola as "the real thing", "Peacekeeper" missiles. Keep a wild eye out for these!

She invites us to celebrate ourselves anew as "Spinsters, Lesbians, Hags, Crones and Harpies". The amazonian voyager is invited to journey with her to confront old ways of thinking and speaking, to consider ancient connections such as the common Indo-European root of tree and true. "Sibyls who are Re-membering our Sinful Sense of Directon practice Space-Craft. This is the art of Spinning beyond the compass. It is also skill in walking/talking the Wrong Way, moving in Wicked directions, opening doors to Other dimensions... This is Metapatriarchial Space/Time, beyond the measurements of compasses and maps."...

We need all the encouragement we can get, and here is a wide, wild, yet scholarly vision and source of authentic inspiration.

*Gyn/Ecology, The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, by Mary Daly, The Women's Press, 1978

**Patriarchy: "...society in which every legitimated institution is entirely in the hands of males and a few selected henchwomen; society characterised by oppression, repression, depression, narcissism, cruelty, racism, classism, ageism, objectification, sadomasochism, necrophilia..."

***Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language. Conjured by Mary Daly in cahoots with Jane Caputi, The Women's Press, 1988