BEFORE SEXUALITY

THE CONSTRUCTION OF EROTIC EXPERIENCE IN THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD

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As members of human society, perhaps the most difficult task we face daily is that of touching one another—whether the touch is physical, moral, emotional, or imaginary. Contact is crisis. As the anthropologists say, “Every touch is a modified blow.” The difficulty presented by any instance of contact is that of violating a fixed boundary, transgressing a closed category where one does not belong. The ancient Greeks seem to have been even more sensitive than we are to such transgressions and to the crucial importance of boundaries, both personal and extrapersonal, as guarantors of human order. Their society developed a complex cultural apparatus, including such rituals as supplication, hospitality, and gift-exchange, which historians and anthropologists are only recently coming to understand as mechanisms for defining and securing the boundaries of everything in the habitable world. Civilization is a function of boundaries.

In such a society, individuals who are regarded as especially lacking in control of their own boundaries, or as possessing special talents and opportunities for confounding the boundaries of others, evoke fear and controlling action from the rest of society. Women are so regarded by men in ancient Greek society, along with suppliants, strangers, guests, and other intruders. But the threat which women pose is not only greater in degree than that presented by other transgressors of boundaries; it is different in kind. “Let a man not clean his skin in water that a woman has washed in. For a hard penalty follows on that for a long time,” Hesiod advises (Op. 753–55). When we focus on Greek attitudes to and treatment of the female, we see anxiety about boundaries from a particular

1Crawley (1927), 1.78.
perspective—that of hygiene, physical and moral. Considerations of pollution, which do not noticeably predominate in other ruses of contact like gift-exchange or supplication, assert themselves when the crises of contact involve erotic relations between male and female. Why?

**TRANSGRESSION**

Female transgression begins in social fact. Woman is a mobile unit in a society that practises patriarchal marriage (which Greek society is generally agreed to have done), and man is not. From birth the male citizen has a fixed place in the oikos (“household”) and polis (“city-state”), but the female moves. At marriage a wife is taken not just (and perhaps not at all) into her husband’s heart but into his house. This transgression is necessary (to legitimate continuation of the oikos), dangerous (insofar as the oikos incorporates a serious and permanent crisis of contact), and creates the context for illicit varieties of female mobility, for example that of the adulteress out of her husband’s house, with attendant damage to male property and reputation. Both as subject and object of love, the unstable female presented Greek society with a set of tactical and moral problems that it never quite solved, but which it sought to clarify, during the archaic and classical periods, by recourse to pollution beliefs and the code of conduct governing miasmata (“defilements”) in general. To isolate and insulate female erōs, from society and from itself, was demonstrably the strategy informing many of the notions, conventions, and rituals that surrounded female life in the ancient world. I want to examine this strategy for its logic and its practice by asking, first, what the ancients meant by dirt and why they disliked it; second, what they did with their dirt and their dislike. It will not be possible, for the most part, to distinguish physical from metaphysical, nor concept from cause. But if we look closely at the dilemma posed by female dirt, we will begin to see the outlines of an ideology powerful enough to shape the major details of women’s lives, even to the design of their wedding ceremonies.

First, let us consider the logic of female pollution.

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2Vernant (1974) has analyzed the mythic world of Greek marriage in terms of space and movement, boundaries and displacement. See also, Visser (1986), 149–53.

3Many societies resort to codes of pollution to regulate and rationalize human situations where order and sense elude them, such as sex. “When moral rules are obscure or contradictory there is a tendency for pollution beliefs to simplify or clarify the point at issue,” says Douglas (1966), 141. See also, Parker (1983).

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**PUTTING HER IN HER PLACE**

Physiologically and psychologically, women are wet. Hippokrates (Vita. 27) differentiates male from female as follows:

The female flourishes more in an environment of water, from things cold and wet and soft, whether food or drink or activities. The male flowerishes more in an environment of fire, from dry, hot foods and mode of life.

Aristotle makes a similar distinction (Probl. 4.25.879a33–34; cf. 4.28.88a12–20), and suggests that this difference may arise from the inclination of the fetus in the case of a male embryo to lean to the right, a female to the left, given that “the right side of the body is hotter than the left” (GA 4.1.76b2).

It is the consensus of Greek thought that the soundest condition for a human being is dryness, provided it is not excessive dryness. “A dry soul is wisest and best,” Heraklitos asserts (B118 VS). Mature men in a sound and unafflicted condition are dry. In Homer, the efficiently functioning mind of Zeus is characterized as “dry” (πνεῦμα πνευκλίματος, Iliad 14.165). Wetness of mind is an intellectually deficient condition, as we may infer from a passage of Aristophanes where a man speaks of the need to “dry his mind” if he wants to “say anything smart” (Eq. 95–96; cf. Vesp. 1452; ἐν καρπῷ ὑπάρχον), and from Heraklitos who describes the man whose psyche is wet with drunkenness as devoid of both self-control and proper perception, for he stumbles, doesn’t know his way, and must be led by a boy (B117 VS). The dry state of mental alertness may be undermined by wine, sleep, or self-indulgence, according to Diogenes of Apollonia, who proposed in the fifth century that the conscious element

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4Wetness and dryness, as appears from the citations below, are rarely considered apart from temperature, in the context of human physiology. But whereas the statement “women are wet” can be demonstrated fairly universally in ancient examples, the temperature of the female body is not so easily generalized. We are dealing not with physical fact but with cultural and rhetorical artifact; imputations of heat and cold vary in various authors, relative to the thrust of particular arguments. Disagreement between Parmenides and Empedokles, for example, on whether women are colder than men, is examined by Aristotle, with a discussion of the ambiguities of the term “hot” (PA 648a29–649b). It is not surprising, then, if some inconsistency on this point emerges in the testimonia that follow. What is essential for our analysis is to note a clear trend in ancient interpretations of physiological data: women are presumed at home in conditions of physical and emotional extremity that discomfit male flesh and protocol, however these sort themselves as a temperature of life from one rhetorical moment to another in the ancient exegesis of desire. See further the researches of D. Halperin and A. Hanson (esp. at note 115) in this volume.

5Onians (1951), 31; on πνευκλίματος see Chantraine (1968–1980) 3893.
in man consisted of air and that an individual's intelligence depended on the dryness of this air: "Understanding is the work of the pure and dry air. For moisture hinders intelligence, wherefore in sleep and in drunkenness and in surfeit understanding is diminished" (A19 VS). The assault of emotion was also thought to be an endangering wetness. Emotion pours into a person and melts, loosens, dissolves him. Fear is "wet" (υρέσις, 122.4 W) and causes Anakreon to "drip" (ακοφασταλός, 395.4 PMG). Painful anxiety "falls in drops" within the minds of Aiskhylos' chorus (ορέξ, Ag. 179–80). Envy melts the eyes and heart of the envious in a Hellenistic epigram (AP 11.193). The emotions of ἔρως are especially liquid and liquefying. Ερῶς pours, drips, heats, softens, melts, loosens, cooks, boils, dissolves. Men pride themselves on being able to resist such assaults on their physiological and psychological boundaries. A fragment of Sophokles instructs us, "The chest of a good man does not soften" (fr. 195 P). Ancient medical theory endorses the view that dryness is best and is a masculine prerogative. According to Hippokrates, the maturity of the male physique is achieved when it attains and keeps its proper dry form, which occurs when the element of fire within "is no longer overmastering but standing still and the body no longer trembles with growth" (Vic. 33).

This condition of dry stability is never attained by the female physique, which presumably remains cold and wet all its life. Partly by virtue of her innate wetness, woman is more subject to man than to liquefying assaults upon body and mind, especially those of emotion. Aristotle tells us that the female is softer than the male (μαλακότερος) and much more easily moved to tears, pity, jealousy, despondency, fear, and rash impulses (HA 9.1.608b); Empedokles calls woman πολυκυστίον ("much in tears," B62.1 VS). Semonides catalogues the subjection of women to gluttony, extravagance, instability of mood, and sexual desire (7 W). Women are assumed to be markedly more open to erotic emotion than men and sexually insatiable once aroused. A long tradition concerning female lewdness derives from this assumption, of which a few ex-

6Kritias says that, in drunkenness, memory is melted out of the mind by forgetfulness, and the mind stumbles (B6.12 VS).
7The epithet is Valckenaer's conjecture for the unmetrical λεγόν and is printed by most editors, although opinions remain divided on the wetness of fear: Kamerbeek in fact proposes αὐτῶς ("dry"). See Renfrew (1976), 37–38.
8See Fränkel, ad loc., and cf. 1121; Eut., Suppl. 79–80.
9In the absence of any satisfactory etymology for ιππαί ("I desire") applied to one moved sexually, Omiand suggests an original derivation from ιππαί ("I pour out"); related to ιππαί ("dew") and signifying in the middle voice "I pour myself out, emit liquid, am poured out." He compares ὠρθώνοι ("I hate") which began in the physical "I freeze, stiffen at": Omiand (1951), 202 n. 4.
10Cf. Aristotle, GA 728a19–22; Prebl. 879a; see also above, n. 4.

amples may be mentioned. Aiskhylos warns against the "blazing eye" of a woman who has once "tasted man" (γυναῖκος . . . έλεγον ταῖς θρήνοις ἐκ τοῦ μετανόησαι τήν γεγομένην, fr. 243 Nauck) anddeprecated female license as "ready to dare anything" for love (παντότο καθώς ἐρωτα, Ch. 594). Sophokles observes that even women who have sworn to avoid the pain of childbirth cannot resist sexual desire (fr. 932 P). The lust of women is a frequent joke in Aristophanes (e.g., Thesm. 504ff.; Ekkl. 668–70; Nub. 555ff.; Lys. 553ff.). Alkiphron characterizes female sexual voracity as a "Kharybdis" (1.6.2), warning another man that his heitaia will swallow him whole (3.33). Both Hippokrates (de Morb. Mal. 1) and Plato (Tim. 91c) promote the theory of the "wandering womb," an explanation of feminine hysteria which is predicated on women's uncontrollable longing for sex. Aristotle takes female inconstancy for granted as a consequence of feminine weakness (EN 7.7.1150b6) and a reason for marrying girls off not later than the age of eighteen (Pol. 7.14.1335a29).

In the Greek historians, whenever mention is made of a society or state of affairs managed by women, it is assumed that such situations would feature total female promiscuity. For example, Philo of Byblos, accounting for traditions of matrilineral descent in antiquity, explains: "They traced their descent on the mother's side because women at that time had intercourse casually with any man they ran into." Philo takes it for granted that, unrestrained by an alternate system, women would incline to complete wantonness.11

What is the connection between wantonness and wetness? First, wetness makes women more vulnerable to Eros' onslaughts in psychic form than men. Second, female wetness gives women a weapon against excessive heat and dryness which men do not possess. The parching heat of the Dog Days, for example, is said by Hippokrates to be beneficial for those "phlegmatic by nature," a class which includes "women and water men," but it causes the generality of men to "wither right up" (λιθογραφία ἐνεκριθεῖσαν, Acr. 10.85f.). Aristotle pursues this matter in his Problems. He asks the question, "Why are men less capable of sexual intercourse in summer but women more so?" and answers, "Because hot nature collapse in summer by excess of heat, while cold ones flourish. Now a man is hot and dry but a woman is cold and moist. So the power

11See Dover (1973), 60–63; (1964), 31–32. Dover's account of this attitude is characteristically crisp: "A certain tendency to regard women as irresponsible and ever ready to yield to sexual temptation relieved a cuckolded husband of a sense of shame or inadequacy" (1973), 62.
12See Pembroke (1967), who discusses this tendency on the part of Greek writers to identify matriarchal situations with female promiscuity on the basis of little evidence, or in the face of contradictory evidence. Also Pembroke (1965); Vidal-Naquet
of a man is diminished at that time but a woman’s power flourishes because it is balanced by its contrary” (4.25.879a31–35).

We find in poetry too this concern for the withering effect of the Dog Days on the masculine physique. In a poem modeled on Hesiod (Op. 582–96), Alkaios represents the time of Seirios’ rising as a season of blistering heat which parches men to incapacity while encouraging the license of women to burgeon (fr. 347 LP). As the poem shifts delicately from weather to sexuality, it becomes clear that the focus of male concern (and perhaps resentment) here is not a summer heat wave but the unwitherable appetite and capacity of the female sex:

> τέγγε πλέωμονας οὐν, το γὰρ ἀστρον περετέλεται, ἀδικάς ἀφηλέται, πάντα ἐκ δύσματος ὑπὸ καφάσματος, ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῶν τέττες πτερυγίων ὑπὸ κακχέει λωγίρων πόνων αἰδέαν, ἔχουσα ὑπό βλάστημα ταῦτα τὰ στιχαίαιν καταλαμβανόμενον καθεδείη
> ἀδει ἐκ τούλιμων ἔκ τού γάμαιν ἑμαρώταται, λέπτοι δ’ ἄνδρες, ἐπεὶ δὴ κεφάλαι καὶ γόνα Σείρος ἀσάλει.

(347 LP)

Wet your lungs with wine for the Star is coming round. The season is harsh, all things thirst beneath the heat. From the leaves the cricket sends sweet noise, pouring down from its wings one shrill song after another, whenever in blazing summer . . . the artichoke is blooming. And now is the time when women are at their most polluted but men are delicate, for the Dog Star parches head and knees.

One word calls for particular attention in this passage: μαρώταται in line 6. Editors of the text generally advise us that we cannot know exactly what Alkaios means by “most polluted” here, and they reduce the word to a term of nonspecific abuse like “abominable” or “most pestilential.” However, Alkaios’ style of abuse in other poems is anything but nonspecific, and a powerful clue to his meaning is contained in the passage of Hesiod on which he has very explicitly based this poem. In almost identical terms, Hesiod describes a midsummer scene where

> ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοι γυναικός ἁνήρ ληφθείει (Ἀργείων)
> τῆς ἀγάθης, τῆς δ’ οὐκ κακίας οὐ βίοιν ἄλλῳ,
> δεσποτικὸς ἂν τ’ ἄνδρα καὶ ζῇ λίβαῦν περ ἐόντα
> εἰς ἀτερ ἀδυλίων καὶ ὁμα δόκη σε ὰδακε.

(Opera 702–5)

For a man wins no better prize than a good woman, and none more chilling than a bad one—always hunting something to devour. And no matter how strong he is, she roasts her man without fire, and hands him over to a raw old age.

Hesiod, in the midst of giving advice on choosing a wife, abandons metaphors of weather and identifies the withering factor as female sexual power itself. The voracious woman, by her unending sexual demands, "roasts her man" in the unquenchable fire of her appetite, drains his manly strength and delivers him to the "raw old age" of premature impotence. We find a similar complaint in a later poet:

> έστι γας πυρὸς ἀντιδίδειται
> δάου, ἀντιπόλει τοῦ πυρὸς ἀντιδίδειν
> ἄνδρα γὰρ ἐκκακίας ταῖς φρονίσισιν ἥδε μαρεινέ
> καὶ γόφρας προτέρες τῆς νεότητι φερεῖ.

(Ἀρ. 9.165.1–4; cf. Hesiod, Op. 57)

Woman is the wrath of Zeus, a gift given in place of fire—cruel countergift! For she burns a man with cares and withers him up and brings old age on youth too soon.

And the archaic poet Arkhiloхkhos summarizes the female threat in two iambic verses:

> τῇ μὲν ἑνδὸν ἑσφόροι
> δολοφρονεῖσι ταῖς χεῖρι, θητέρη δὲ πῦρ.

(fr. 184 W)

13LSJ make a special category, “μext = μαχλός,” for this passage. Page maintains “the usual meanings of μαχλος are inappropriate here” and renders “confounded,” “damnable.” Burnett (1983), 133, reminds us that Powell “gallantly proposed an emendation, φασάωτας ‘plumpest.’” See also Wilamowitz (1913), 63, n. 1.

The Greek poets find sexuality in women a fearsome thing, it threatens the very essence of a man's manliness. The foundations of the threat appear to be two.

Congenially more susceptible to the inducements of appetite than men, women do not experience either of the constraints which check the male. Women feel no physical need to control desire since, by virtue of innate wetness, female capacity is virtually inexhaustible. In addition, the female nature lacks the σφοροσύνη ("soundness of mind" or "sobriety and self-control") by which men subject desires to rational mastery from within. Σφοροσύνη, the essence of the power to keep one's physical and psychological boundaries intact, is a word of rich and varying overtones in its application to masculine exemplars, but feminine σφοροσύνη always includes, and is frequently no more than, chastity. From its first uses in Homer, σφοροσύνη is the activity of checking some natural impulse or closing the boundaries of the phrenes ("wits") by will. The resulting "soundness" of phrenes is closely associated in Greek thought with αἶδος ("shame"): both virtues concern self-containment. "What the classical σφοροσύνη shares with the Homeric αἶδος is chiefly a fear of overstepping boundaries," says Helen North. Aristotle concedes σφοροσύνη to women but insists on defining it differently for female and for male, as for master and slave. For the man, σφοροσύνη is rational self-control and resistance to excess; for the woman, σφοροσύνη is dutifulness and obedience. A woman cannot control herself, so her σφοροσύνη must consist in submitting herself to the control of others (Pol. 1260a20-24; 1277b20-24). Aristotle also denies to women a full measure of αἶδος; the female is an aideshow ("comparatively shameless," HA 608b12). Exempt from shame as from all fear of drying up, woman goes at sex like a hippomaniac mare. 

A man and woman in Theokritos debate this fear: 27.27-28.

Both North (1966), 1. North concludes, "This view of feminine ἀντὶ aligns Aristotle with most of the Greeks except Sokrates and Plato. When the word σφοροσύνη begins to mean 'chastity' for men as well as women (from the second half of the fifth century) masculine and feminine chastity prove to be differently defined: masculine chastity derives from self-control, the opposite of ἄνοιξις, feminine chastity from obedience": ibid., 76, n. 105; see also 206; Dover (1978), 67-68; Freud, in a letter to Eduard Silberstein cited by Grosskurth (1980), 889: "A thinking man is his own legislator and confessor, and obtains his own ablation, but the woman, let alone the girl, does not have the measure of ethics in herself. She can only act if she keeps within the limits of morality, following what society has established as fitting. She is never forgiven if she has revolted against morality, possibly rightly so."

"In eagerness for sexual intercourse," Aristotle explains, "of all female animals the mare comes first, next the cow. Mares become horse-mad and the term derived from this

Aristotle tells us that "the warmer the weather and the better their physical condition," the more eagerly do mares and cows seek intercourse. The female animal in heat cannot restrain herself; a bull-struck cow will mount the bull herself, warns Aristotle; no herdsman can check her (HA 572a30-b4). Similarly, once initiated, women revel in sex and do not wish to stop. Being innately moist, they do not need to stop. Having no σφοροσύνη, they do not think to stop.

The unfailing moisture and sexual drive of woman are part of a larger pattern, part of a larger harmony between women and the elements of nature in general. United by a vital liquidity with the elemental world, woman is able to tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of nature's procreative power. Man, meanwhile, holds himself fiercely and thoughtfully apart from this world of plants, animals, and female wantoness—doubly estranged from it, by his inherent dryness of form and by the σφοροσύνη with which he maintains form. Marriage is the means, in the Greek view, whereby man can control the wild erōs of women and impose civilized order on the chaos of nature. Thus we find a fifth-century bridegroom speaking of his bride as a wild animal which became, only after a period of confinement and kind treatment, "submissive to my hand and domesticated enough to make conversation" (Xenophon, Oec. 3.7-10).

one animal is applied by way of abuse to women who are inordinate in their sexual desires" (HA 572a18-23).

10Cf. Arkhilehkos' eugenic anxiety in the Cologne Epide (39-41): δείδομαι ὅτως μὴ πωλαν κόλπημα / ἐσποτάξῃ ἐπηγείμαν / τὰς ὀμοῖας ἢ κώμας τεκνίην. ("I fear she'll give birth to blind pups / in hot haste like a bitch.")

11It is noteworthy that, in Hippocratic theories about female hysteria and "the wandering womb," the factor which threatens to dry women is not sexual indulgence but rather deprivation (De morb. mul. 1; cf. Plato, Tim. 91a). Indeed, wetness itself may have been thought to be nourished by the heat of love. Phautroph proposes that "moisture, the most primary of all substances in nature, is the element that provides nourishment for heat. This is proved by the fact that flames increase when oil is added. Fire naturally feeds on liquid" (Qu. conv. 687a, 696b). Theophrastos takes a similar view: "Fire burns so long as it has moisture and moisture is its only food. Flame is made by the constant interchange between dry and moist" (Metra. 2.2).

12Male homosexual activity seems not to have been regarded as drying and debilitating to the same degree as relations with a woman. Evidence mainly amounts to an argument from silence; the poets do not generally express this fear on the part of a male lover in connection with pederasty. Boys themselves, being comparatively moist creatures, were thought to share the feminine capacity for sex, but they were not similarly motivated by pleasure in relations with males and were presumably checked, even when pleased, by the σφοροσύνη innate in the male disposition. Risk of desiccation entered the picture, however, hand in hand with marriage plans, or so we may infer from Achilles Tatius' plea to his beloved boy: "Do not destroy the bloom of your youth before its time; for, among other things, this is the catastrophe of marriage: it dries up the prime of life. I beg you, Kharkiles, for my sake, don't wither!" See also Hippokrates. Vit. 33; Xenophon, Symp. 8.21; Dover (1978), 52, 67.
The notion of female savagery persists in Greek thinking from prehistoric through classical times. "Woman is one great bestiality!" says Menander (μεγάτερον ἐστι θηριων γυνη, fr. 488 Kock). The Greeks were neither the first nor the last to subscribe to this notion; what is important for our purpose is to see where the notion led. The words of a later author, the second-century sophist Aelian, give some indication. In his treatise On the Nature of Animals, Aelian concludes his discussion of poisonous vipers by telling us that the asp is the most poisonous of all. Then he adds, "But a wild animal even more polluted [μεγαρῶτερον] than an asp is the woman who dabbles in poisons!" (NA 1.54).

The assimilation of woman to the world of raw nature is a coin with two sides. Its standard is sexuality. The presexual or asexual female in Greek thought is part of the wilderness, an untamed animal who, given a choice, prefers the wild life of Artemis, roaming the woods undomesticated and unloving of men. The sexually initiated woman, on the other hand, soon proceeds through her licentiousness to bestialization, for to let oneself go in ἐρώς is a bestializing experience. We find these ideas put to full and precise use by Greek society, as part of a conceptual complex aimed at validating and perpetuating the civil institution of monogamous marriage and family life. This complex included the following notions: that a woman's life has no prime, but rather a season of unripe virginity followed by a season of overripe maturity, with the single occasion of defloweration as the dividing line; that marriage is the means whereby a woman can be cleansed of bestiality and complete

22The unwed maiden is ἑρώτερα (Pindar, Pyth. 9.6; Homer, II. 21.471; Xenophon, Cyr. 6.13; Paumassis, 1.19.6), or ἀδάμαρος (Homer, Od. 6.383; 6.619; Sophokles, El. 1239), or κύριαρκης (AIshkylos, Ag. 245; Aristophanes, Lys. 217). She is a fawn (Anakreon, 408 PMG), a heifer (Epikrates, fr. 9 Kock), a slyly (Anakreon, 417 PMG), a viper (Sophokles, Ant. 531), a gazelle (AP 5.292), an unfledged bird (Aristophanes, fr. 582 Kock), a swelling bean (Aristophanes, ibid.), a ripening apple (Sappho, 105a LP).

23The mature and sexually active woman is a wild sow paving to be loosed (Aristophanes, Lys. 683), a horse in need of taming (Plutarch, Conjug. prac. 139b), a bitch (Homer, II. 3.180; 6.344; 6.356; Od. 11.424; 11.427; 8.319; 19.154; Archilochos, Col. Ep. 35), an ass (Semonides, 7 W), a weasel (ibid.), a brood mare (Pindar, fr. 122 S-M). Prostitutes take their names from insects or animals; Anaxilas offers a compendium of such names (fr. 22 Kock), e.g., Phrynke ("Toad"); Lykaina ("Wolf"); Múia ("Fly"). The word ἀρκης ("horse") is an idiom for "lecherous woman"; Themistokles once yoked four prostitutes to a chariot and drove them into the marketplace (ForHist 2.491; Athen., 535d). Plutarch tells us that Philip lost his enthusiasm for sleeping with Olympias when he entered her chamber one night to find a huge serpent stretched out beside her on the bed. "This more than anything else abated Philip's ardor" (Alex. 2.4-5). Woman, as we have seen, is a tame or tameable animal in Aristotle (GA 775b4-7) and in Xenophon (Oec. 7.10); for Aelian, "a wild animal more polluted than an asp" (NA 1.54; see further below). Many agricultural and animal metaphors for the female genitalia are enumerated by Henderson (1975), 117. See also duBois (1988); Golden (1988), 1-12.

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herself as a human being; that the procreative act of sex between man and woman, especially within the context of marriage, is to be distinguished from all varieties of sexual flirtation, seduction, and dalliance as "work" is from "play"; that sexual "play" pollutes a woman while sexual "work" does not and may in fact retrieve her from pollution. Let us consider these notions in closer detail.

RIPENESS

It is one of the complaints urged against war by Aristophanes' Lysistrata that it leaves girls aging alone in their maiden apartments (Lys. 593). When her interlocutor retorts, "Do not men also age?" Lysistrata answers, "Well yes, but the word doesn't mean the same thing!" (μα Δε', ἄλλα οὐκ εἶπας δομοῦ). Let us test Lysistrata's assertion by examining some of the words used in Greek to describe women, and women's age, and see whether they mean the same thing when used of men.

Anakreon puts into a woman's mouth the plaintive words:

κυνή τε τῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ πέπεφυκα γίνομαι
σὴν δὲ μαραγκήσης.

(432 PMG)

I am becoming a wrinkled, rotten thing
as a result of your debauchery!

The word πέπεφυκα ought to mean "ripe," "at the peak," "in its prime" (in Latin, maturus), as it does when used of fruit (Theophrastos, H.P. 3.6.9), or of disease (Hippokrates, Acat. 390), or of young boys who are like figs ripe upon the tree and in danger of being despoiled (AP 12.185), boys who are "good-looking" (καλός) and "ripe for lovers" (φιλέτοις πέπεφυκα, AP 12.9). Anakreon, however, appears to use πέπεφυκα as a synonym for κυνή, a word which Herodian suggests means "shrivelled up and all but rotten," as of fruit ready to fall to the ground. The word

24To derogate a boy who is past his prime, Theokritos uses the adjective πέπεφυκα not in its positive degree, but in the comparative formulation "riper than a pear" (ἀμπικοκαρδιός πέπεφυκα, 7.120), a phrase whose exact reference remains unclear (Gow, ad loc, suggests "Theocritus is perhaps thinking of the rapidity with which ripeness passes into rottenness in this fruit"), but which in its context precisely underscores our argument for a misogynist usage. The boy in question is overripe by virtue of his actual years, not his sexual experience (erotic aloofness is the point of his lover's complaint), and his δομος is described in the following verse by a verb (δισσομεί) in the present indicative tense: "Thy fair bloom is falling," Gow renders. Nowhere do we find, for it would be a contradiction in terms, the female δομος falling in the present tense: woman's peak is a perfect experience. This Theokritan passage was brought to my attention by David Halperin.
πέτευσα here must mean not “ripen” but “overripen” and the cause of this condition is clearly stated: σὴν δέι μαργαριτήν. Sexual indulgence brings the woman not to her peak but past it. Aristophanes uses this adjective as a synonym for γυναίκα (“old woman,” Ekk. 876 and schol.), and Arkhilokhos applies it dismissively to the Neoboule whose “insane” sexual license (κόροι μανουλᾶς) has relegated her to the undesirable category (Col. Ep. 26–31). Proof of Neoboule’s insatiable appetite for sex is straightforward: ἄνθος δ’ ἀπερρήματε παρθενήν (“her maiden flower has fallen”). Her “overripeness” consists in this same fact. Its result is to deprive her of charm and render her subject for curses. Clearly, here as in Anakreon’s poem, πέτευσα is used without approbation in a way that somewhat distorts its lexical meaning.25 And behind the distortion lurk some assumptions—namely, that a woman’s first sexual experience catapults her into uncontrolled sexual activity and out of the category of desirable sex-object, for she is past her peak the moment the ἄνθος (flower) falls.

A comparable distortion can be seen in Greek usage of the word ὀπώρα. This word means “fruit-time,” “the time between the rising of Scirios and of Arktoiros when the fruit ripens,” and also the fruit itself. When used metaphorically of males, ὀπώρα signifies “the bloom of youth” or “ripe manhood,” and does not exclude the pursuit of sexual fulfillment.26 But when used of females, ὀπώρα means virginity and is to be withheld from all erotic experimentation. Danaos warns his daughters:

τέρεων ὀπώρα δ’ εὐφάνειας σοιδαμὸς.

(Aiskhylus, Suppl. 998)

The tender fruit-time is by no means easy to safeguard and they piously reply:

ἐμῖς δ’ ὀπώρα ὁφεκ’ εἶδ θράσει, πατέρε.

(1015)

Don’t you worry about my fruit-time, father!

When not thus guarded, a woman’s ὀπώρα becomes blackened (as an overripen fruit?), undesirable and accursed:

25 A similar ambiguity perhaps contributes to confusion between δρπτεψη ("ripened on the tree") of figs, e.g., Aristophanes, Lys. 564 and δρπτεψη ("overripe, ready to fall") of prostitutes, e.g., Aristophanes fr. 141 Kock which are constant variant readings for one another in manuscripts (see LS).
26 E.g., Pindar, Isthm. 2.4–5: ἄστει ἄκουν καθὸς ἄρχειν Ἀφροδίτην/ εὐθύνην μισθωτοῦ ἀνθέταν ὀπώρα (“whichever beautiful boy attained the sweet season of ripeness, woe of fair-throned Aphrodite”).

The word ἆλικα is also used differently of men and of women. For men it means a mature time of life during which they become, as Xenophon says, “useful” or “good” (χρῆσιμοι) and then continue to improve with age (ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον ἐπιδίδοσιν, Oec. 2.10). For women it means virginity. Aiskhines, as an example, uses the word ἆλικα twenty-three times: twenty-two times of men in the sense “time of life” or “prime of life” or “bloom”; once of a woman, discovered by her father to have been unchaste and so walled up in a house with a horse, “since he found out that his own daughter had been ruined and had not preserved her bloom ἆλικα until marriage.”27

Within these usages is operating an identification of female sexuality with voracious promiscuity and of virginity with the best moment of female life. Implicit here is a denial that free sexual activity and “blooming” are compatible for a woman. There is no such thing as sexually vigorous ripe womanhood in the Greek view. At her peak a woman is sexually untired, whereas the ἆλικα of ὀπώρα of a man emphatically includes sexual activity. “May the flower of my youth remain unplucked” (ἢ βας δ’ ἄνθος ἀδερπτών ἐστω, Aiskhylus, Suppl. 663) is the impassioned prayer of the daughters of Danaos: they are praying to avert marriage. As soon as she lets her ἄνθος (flower) fall, the female is translated to the slippery slope of overripeness: “A woman’s prime is an inch of time!” (τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς μικρὸς ὁ καμήλος, 596).28

The analogy from nature, which we have noticed pervading Greek

27 A fragment of Philomen suggests that the adjective στροφής, when applied to a woman, could carry the connotations of excess and moral discredit which we have seen imported into πέτευσα. The adjective στροφής (in Latin, prudus) means “rotten” of a rope (Aristophanes, Vesp. 1343–44) and “too old for sexual activity” of an aging woman (ibid., 1380; Ekk. 884, 1098) or an old man (Plut. 1086; Pae 698). Philomen’s verses, however, denounce a woman as στροφής without any hint that she is old: στροφήν γυναίκα δ’ ὁ τρόπος εὐφόρου πνεύμα/ πολύ γὰρ διαφέρει σεμαντίας εὐφόρεως (fr. 170 Kock). (“Her way of life makes her putrid, though she has a fine shape. For self-respect is a far different thing than shapeliness.”) It is a way of life characterized by the absence of σεμαντίας (personal dignity or self-respect). Like Neoboule, she has forfeited charm, replacing “shapeliness” with decay. Plausibly, as for Neoboule and the anonymous woman of Anakreon, fr. 432, this forfeiture is a consequence of sexual license, and σεμαντίας has the sense “modesty appropriate to a maiden” (cf. Euripides, I. 1344). The overall purport of these jibes is clear: sexual activity rots a woman.
28 Pindar sees the καμήλος of female life as so fleeting a thing that Danaos must arrange “the swiftest possible marriage” (ἐκποιεῖτο γέμων) for his fifty daughters, in the form of a foot-race, lest midday overtake them unwed (Pyth. 9 114).
notions of female erōs, underwrites these obliquities of diction. A woman who is being compared to an apple or a flower in a field can be said to wither the moment she is “plucked.” Plucking is defloration. Sappho demonstrates this in two swift images, probably from a wedding song, comparing the bride to an apple and then to a hyacinth:

οἶνον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεθιστεῖ άκρυπ ἐπ’ ὑδῷ
ἄκρων ἐπ’ ἄκροτατῷ, λελάθηναι δὲ μαλαδρότητες:
οὐ μᾶν ἐκλελάθην’, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐδύνατ’ ἐπίκεισθαι.
(105a LP)29

As a sweet apple reddens on a high branch
high on the highest branch, and the apple pickers forgot—well no, they didn’t forget: weren’t able to reach.

οὖν τὰς ἁκίνητας ἐν οὐρὲ ποιμένες ἄνδρες
πόσσι καταστείβουσι, χάμαι δὲ τε πάρρων ἄνδροι.
(105c LP)

As a hyacinth in the mountains that shepherds trample underfoot, its purple flower on the ground.

An epigram ascribed to Plato (Diog. Laert. 3.32) puts similar sentiments upon an apple thrown as an invitation to love:

μηλὸν ἐγὼ βάλλει με φιλῶν σε τὰς ἄλλ’ ἐπενεκενιν,
Εὐαίθησιν κάγω καὶ σὺ μαρακνόμεθα.

I am an apple, tossed by someone who loves you: now you,
Xanthippe, nod your head ‘Yes!’ You and I are both withering.

A Hellenistic epigram telescopes the female situation sourly:

πάσα γυνὴ χάλος ἐστιν ἔχει δ’ ἀγάθας δῶο ὅρας:
τὴν μίαν ἐν θαλάμῳ, τὴν μίαν ἐν θανάτῳ.
(AP 11.381)

Woman is bile, and that’s all. Her good seasons are two:
marriage bed and death bed.

WORK AND PLAY

Somewhat at odds with the notion that virginity is the prime of female life, however, is the socially indispensable image of marriage as that function which can secure for a woman, against the ravages of time and putrefaction, some measure of fulfillment, personal and sexual. Ancient Greek society succeeded in recommending the institution of civil marriage by means of a complex machinery of cultural propaganda, surrounding both the procreative act itself and the rituals of the wedding ceremony. Here, as with the ideal of “ripeness,” linguistic usage reflects and reinforces a cultural program. Consider, for example, the metaphor of work and play.

Generally throughout Greek literature, the act of sexual intercourse that engenders or aims at engendering offspring is called “work,” while all other varieties of erotic activity are “play.” As he must labor with his land to produce food, so the Greek husband labors with his wife to produce children, by means of the πόνος (“labor”) or the ἔργον (“work”) or the καμάς (“toil”) of the sexual act.30 Thus the Spartans defined the purpose of marriage as “for the work of begetting” (ἐπὶ τὰς τεκνίδους ἔργας, Plutarch, Comp. Lyc. cum Muc. 4.77). Ancient betrothal formulas specify this ἔργον as that of “sowing” (ἐπὶ παιδῶν γνησίων στόρφω, Clement of Alexandria, Strom. 2.23) or “ploughing” (γνησίων παιδῶν ἐπ’ ἀρότρῳ, Menander, Perik. 435), while in comic contexts the verb “to hoe” (σκαλαθεῖν, or its cognate σκαλαθέρω) is frequently used of sexual intercourse (Aristophanes, Pax 440; Eccl. 611). In Homer, the act of love which engenders “splendid offspring” is called “love-work” (φιλότητα ἔργα, Od. 11.246). Aischylos refers to the procreation of Epaphos as “this work of Zeus, this engendering” (Δῶος τόδ’ ἔργου καὶ τοῦ ἐν γένοις, Suppl. 588; cf. 1034–37). When Hippokrates describes the activity of sexual intercourse as an exertion that reduces the flesh by melting, he terms it πόνος (Vet. 2.58). By means of the πόνος of sex, the Greek husband domesticates his wild bride and, just as he does for his land and the beasts on it, brings to fruition what would otherwise remain savage and unproductive.31

Distinct from the πόνος of sex in Greek diction we find the παυεῖα (“play”) of erotic dalliance. Erotic “play” may include premarital, extramarital, homosexual, or even marital relations, provided these do not take the form of coitus for procreative purposes. What generally distin-

29Himerios (Declam. 9.16) comments on this poem: “Sappho compared a virgin to an apple, allowing those who would pluck it before its time not even to taste it with their fingertips, but he who would pluck it in the right season might watch its beauty grow.” Female beauty grows until the moment of plucking.

30Cf. Xenophon, Mem. 2.1.11.

31Woman, like the Greek soil, reverts to wilderness if not "worked": see the extended discussion of duflo (1988).
guishes the two terms in Greek erotic theory is product. Erotic "play" produces pleasure. Erotic "work" can generate offspring. Thus a poem of the *Anthology* designates as παίγνια ("games") the foreplay that precedes sexual ἐργα proper:

ἐστιν προφυλακὴ πρῶτα πληγὴστα καὶ τὰ πρὸ ἐργῶν παίγνια.

(AP 12.209)

Let there be lewd touching first and games before the work.

Note the implication here that erotic "play" is lewd by definition (προφυλακή). This sentiment becomes overt moral theory in Plutarch, according to whom a "whorish" (ἐποικοκος) woman is distinguishable from a proper wife by her use of myrrh and rouge (instead of olive oil and soap) and her willingness to "play with her husband" (πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα παίζει τι, *Conjg. prac. 142a*). Elsewhere Plutarch expresses the view that the pleasure of sexual dalliance is not an aim of marriage but in fact has a debilitating effect, for women who "gain mastery of their husbands by means of sexual pleasure" (χορμόντωσα δὲ ἡπονητής) render them degenerate fools, just as Kirke did Odysseus and his men (*ibid. 139a*).

As far as women were concerned, Greek society made use of the work/play distinction in two ways. First, to exclude the female from erotic "play" and confine her to the utilitarian "work" of love within a domestic context. Second, to bracket together (as did metaphors of sterility and wildness drawn from nature) the prostitute and the virgin in one category, in order to oppose this category to that of legitimate wife, for the recommendation of the latter. Both the κόρη and the ἑταρά are outside marriage, outside work. Both represent unproductive, unserious conditions, not to be lingered in.

Unwed girls are παιδες ("children") and are thought to spend their lives largely in play. With the image of Nausikaa and her handmaiden playing at their laundry (Homer, *Od. 6.92*), and then playing with their ball (6.100), we may contrast the married women of epic who seem to spend their lives at the loom.33 The eccentric Kyrene of Pindar spurns not only domestic work but also passing time in τέφρας ("play" or "amusements") with the girls of her house (Pyth. 9.18–19); τέφρας is also the word used by Arkhilokhos for his sport with the maiden of the *Cologne Epode* (13). In his epithalamium of Helen, Theokritos says that, had she not been taken in marriage, the bride could have "played until deep dawn with her playmates" (παιδα... σὺν παιδι... παιδεων ἐς βαθύν ὀξυρω... 18.13–14). Theokritos goes on to describe how marriage will transform Helen's unproductive virgin state (likened to a cornfield without corn, a treeless garden, an untamed horse) into the ἐργα of the fruitful wife: spinning, weaving, childbearing, and song. In a fragment of Sophokles, young girls lament the abrupt difference that marriage makes in a female life and describe the carefree prenuptial period:

αἱ νέαι μὲν εν πατρὸς
παιστοὶ, αἱ μαῖι, ἀνθρώπων βοῦν,
τέφρων γὰρ ἐκ παιδας ἀναγιγερεί.

(fr. 583.3–5 P)

We young girls have the sweetest time of our life in the house of our father, I think:
carelessness keeps us delightedly children,
day after day.

The Greek wedding ceremony dramatizes the bride's transition from her "wild" days of play to the civilized work of married life. On the day before the wedding, Pollux informs us, the bride performed preliminary rites (προαύλια or προτέλεως) in which she said farewell to her girlhood and consecrated her toys to Artemis (Pollux, 3.39; Pausanias, 2.33.1). A number of epigrams in the *Anthology* commemorate such an event; in the following, a girl dedicates her tambourine, ball,34 headress, and childish garments to Artemis with the words:

32Huizinga (1949), 52, shows the same distinction operating in the Blackfoot language of the Algonquin Indians, where the verbal stem *kooni* has two major usages, to designate all children's games and to designate illicit erotic relationships. German has *Spielkind* for a child born out of wedlock. Huizinga lists other examples (Dutch, Old English, Sanskrit) of a widespread and fundamental equation between play and erotic activity, especially in illicit contexts. "It is not the act as such that the spirit of language tends to conceive as play; rather the road thereto, the preparation for and introduction to 'love'... but it would be erroneous to incorporate the sexual act itself, as love-play, in the play category. The biological process of pairing does not answer the formal characteristics of play as we postulated them. Language also normally distinguishes between love-play and copulation. The term 'play' is especially or even exclusively reserved for erotic relationships falling outside the norm" (pp. 62–63). Cf. Achilles Tatius, 1.10.

33Plutarch tells of the Kyrenian heroine Arethipha, who saved her city from destruction, then promptly reentered the women's quarters and put on her proper female occupation like a garment of days: "And for the rest of her life she worked at the loom, leading a quiet existence with her friends and relatives" (*Mul. viv. 257ε*).

34With the σφαῖρα (ball) of 6.280 we should compare Anacreon, 358 PMG and construe his adjective ἱππότηρα, usually translated "lovely," as a quasi-technical term referring to the ball's conventional use as a mechanism of seduction and flirtation. The ball, like the apple, is especially useful in love-play as a means of challenging another person's boundaries without incurring the risk and responsibility of personal contact by hand or gift. A touch or a proffered gift demands a response; a tossed ball may be missed or ignored without
An alternative rite is mentioned by Photios, who says that as part of the wedding rite the bride's father sent to her new oikos gifts of gold and little dishes containing "the playthings of her girlhood" (παίγνια, παιζώνα, Photios, s.v. λεικάνα). Cathulus' hymeneal chorus closes its song at the door of the nuptial chamber with the instruction: "Now we have played enough, it is time for you two to go to work!" (Lusimus satis. At boni contingentes . . . exercete, 61.225–28).

The wedding ceremony ritually replaces the bride's childhood toys with symbols of her new working life. Vase paintings show us that members of the wedding procession carried domestic utensils from the repertoire of women's work (spindles, pestles, sieves, winnowing baskets, loaves of bread), and Pollux records that the bride herself carried out of her house a pestle and a sieve, "symbols, obviously, of her own proper labor" (σημεία, ὡς εἰκός, αὐτορύχος, 3.37–38) to be hung above the door of the nuptial chamber. Solon ordained that brides should carry a vessel for roasting barley (φρόντισθεν) in the wedding procession "as a symbol of barley work" (σημείου αὐτορύχος, Pollux, 1.246). The wedding ceremony also dramatizes the shedding of virgin "wildness" and transition to civilized wifehood. The bride completes her preliminary rites by offering the ἄπαρχος (first fruits or primal offerings) of her hair to Artemis, perhaps to symbolize trimming the wild foliage of her head in final tribute to the goddess of the wild condition. After marriage she will wear her hair bound, loose or tossed hair is the sign of the bacchante or the prostitute. The bride then takes her nuptial bath. The bath is a crucial moment in her transition from girlhood to wifehood. Girls in the Troad waded into the river Skamandros to wash off their wildness with the words: "Take, Skamandros, my virginity" (Ἀδελφοί μου, Σκαμάνδρε, τὴν παρθενίαν, ps.-Aiskhines, Epist. 10.3.680).

Women, we have observed, are wet. Aristotle tells us that the wet (τὸ ὑγρό) is that which is not bounded by any boundary of its own but can readily be bounded, while the dry (τὸ φύτρων) is that which is already bounded by a boundary of its own but can with difficulty be bounded (De gen. et corr. 329b31–33). If we consider the ancient conception of gender in the light of this distinction, we see that woman is to be differentiated from man, in the ancient view, not only as wet from dry but as content from form, as the unbounded from the bounded, as polluted from pure, and that these qualities are necessarily related to one another.

The image of woman as a formless content is one that is expressed explicitly in the philosophers. Plato compares the matter of creation to a mother, in his Timaeus, for it is a υπόποντη ("receivable," "reservoir," to spirits, agencies, influences, and the whole "bacteria of invisible mischief" that swarm the air of human society, as Crawley puts it (1927), 1.19. See Gennep (1960), 26; Douglas (1966), 96. At such crisis points, rituals instigated as safeguards usually include purificatory measures to wash off the past and assimilate new strength for the future. Baths are standard. Transition is also marked by fire, fumigation, feasting, anointing, or exchange of clothes. An illicit or impure transition is one not marked by such ritual, an illicit transgressor is one who does not trouble to wash off the pollution of the old status so as to celebrate entry into the new. Thus the adulterer (μοιχὸς) invades the chamber of his mistress "without feasting or washing his hands" in a fragment of Sophokles (1127 P). On ritual bathing as a nuptial necessity, see Ginouès (1962), esp. 263–82.
admission,” 49a, 50d) which is “shapeless” (ἄμορφος), “viewless” (ἀνόρατος), “all-receiving” (πάνδεχτης) and which “takes its form and activation from whatever shapes enter it” (κυματοειδὲς τε καὶ διαχωματιζόμενον ύπο τῶν εἰσόμενων, 50b). Aristotle accords to the male in the act of procreation the role of active agent, contributing “motion” (κίνησις) and “formation” (γένεσις) while the female provides the “raw material” (ὁ λίθος), as when a bed (the child) is made by a carpenter (the father) out of wood (the mother) (GA 716a6–7; 727b31–34; 729b15–21). Man determines the form, woman contributes the matter. Aristotle expresses a similar view about ὅλον in his Physics (192a20–25), and we might note that the Pythagorean table of oppositions sets πέρας (“boundary” or “limit”) and ἄμεσον (“masculine”) against ἀστερῶν (“the unbounded”) and θήλη (“feminine”) (Aristotle, Met. 986a22ff.).

The assumptions about women that underlie the views of Plato, Aristotle, and the Pythagorans can be traced to the earliest legends of the Greeks. In myth, woman’s boundaries are flint, porous, mutable. Her power to control them is inadequate, her concern for them unreliable. Deformation attends her. She swells, she shrinks, she leaks, she is penetrated, she suffers metamorphoses. The women of mythology regularly lose their form in monstrousity. In turns into a heifer, Kallisto becomes a bear, Medusa sprouts snakes from her head and Skylla yelping dogs from her waist. The Sirens and the Sphinx accumulate unmatched bestial parts, while Daphne passes into leaf and Pasiphae into a mechanical cow. The Graiai make themselves repellent by sharing one human form amongst them, passing an eye and a tooth back and forth as needed. Salmakis merges her form with that of Hermaphroditus to produce a bisexual monster. The Hydra generates heads as fast as they can be lopped off. And of course the Amazons, as their name (a negative prefix attached to the word for “breast”) implies, owe their fearsomeness to the zeal with which they adapt personal form—of their own.

At the same time, the women of myth are notorious adaptors of the forms and boundaries of others. They repeatedly open containers which they are told not to open (e.g., Pandora, the daughters of Kekrops, Danae) or destroy something placed in a container in their keeping (as Althea does the psyche of Meleagros). They prove unreliable as containers themselves; both Zeus and Apollo find it necessary to snatch offspring out of a mother’s womb and internalize it for safekeeping (as Zeus takes Dionysos from Semele, Apollo rescues Asklepios from Koronis), while Kronos swallows his children alive as soon as they emerge from Rhea. Even more distressing are the numerous women of myth who submit masculine form to personal and violent revision. Skylla clips a vital lock from her father’s head, Agave beheads her son with her bare hands, Medea pulls the plug on Talos, Kybele unmans Attis with an axe, and Gaia gives her son a sickle to abbreviate his father in the same way. Mythical women deny male boundaries by enveloping male form in a fatal formlessness, as Klytemnestra encloses Agamemnon in a “garment that has no boundaries” (ὁμορφόφωσκα, Eur., Or. 25), as Deianeira covers Herakles in a “cloud of death” (τοιγός νεφέλα, Soph., Tr. 831) that eats the form of his flesh, as Nephelé enthraps Ixion in the delusion of her own body: “He lay with a cloud—sweet lie!” (νεφέλα παρελέσετο ψεύδος λαλύς, Pind., Pyth. 2.36–37). Love is the principal motivation for female action throughout these legends; nor should we forget that Aphrodite herself was born from the sea-foam around Ouranos’ castrated genitals. And it is significant to note that Greek myth confers upon the typical crime of women a stereotypical punishment in the story of the Daughters of Danaos. These forty-nine girls find it expedient to murder their bridegrooms on their wedding night and are therefore condemned to spend eternity in the underworld, gathering water in a sieve. The sieve is a utensil that we will encounter more than once in our investigation of feminine symbology. The sieve of the Danaiad sums up in a single elliptical image all that is problematic in the relation between women and boundaries.

This same mythological groundwork of assumptions can be discerned not only in the arguments of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, but also in the acts of legislators, the images of poets, the conventions of society, and the rituals of religion: women are formless creatures who cannot or will not or do not maintain their own boundaries and who are awfully adept at confounding the boundaries of others. When we begin to search for the etiology of this conception, we encounter a deep and
abiding mistrust of τὸ ὑγρὸν ("the wet") in virtue of its ability to transform and deform.

We have already noted that Greek men ascribe to the female in general a tendency to "let herself go" in emotion or appetite, a tendency encouraged by her wet nature and by the liquid or liquefying nature of emotions and appetites themselves; men take pride in resisting such dissolution. This putative distinction between male and female tendencies was given early expression in Greek society by the legislation of Solon, which restricted the walks, feasts, trousseaux, mourning, food, drink, and sexual activity of women, and also by the institution of the γυναικούμιοι ("supervisors of women"), special magistrates appointed to maintain feminine eukosmia ("decency" or "good order"). For whereas the male nature credited itself with possessing sufficient sobriety and self-control to maintain its own eukosmia, the female nature was not so credited. Solon's legislation is but one well-publicized example of a complex array of restrictions on the movements and attire and actions of woman, on the spaces and gestures and garments within which she lived. A similar resolve informs all these restrictions: since women do not bound herself, she must be bounded. This is achieved by organization of her space, prescription of her gestures, ordering of her rituals, imposition of headgear, attendants, and other trappings.

A good woman does not exceed the boundary of her oikos. On the shield of Achilleus a wedding procession is depicted, moving past local matrons each standing in the doorway of her own house (Il. 18.490ff; cf. Hesiod, Stat. 270ff). At news of the defeat at Khaireia, the women of Athens ventured as far as their front doors to inquire after husbands, fathers, or brothers, and even this was considered unworthy of them and of their city, according to the orator Lykourgos (Against Leocrates 40). In Pheidias' statue at Eleis, Plutarch says, the tortoise on which Aphrodite rests her foot symbolizes a woman's life, closed upon itself in its own domestic space (Is. et Os. 75). Within the oikos chaste women are lodged in the upper or inner rooms (ὑπερώμον or γυναικούμια), and this is the space to be penetrated by lovers (e.g., Il. 16.134ff). Men are habitually leaving the house to confront the outdoors in war, commerce, political life, friendship, the fields, the sea, the agora. Man is made for ὑπαύγεια ἔργα ἕξο ("work outside in the open air") and woman for τὰ ζιθον ("things within").

Neither the body nor the speech of a "chaste and sensible" (σωφρόν)

woman is "for the public" (ὁμόφως), Plutarch says; moreover, her feelings, character, and disposition must be kept hidden (Consp. praec. 142d; cf. Thukydides, 2.45). Euripides distinguishes the hidden nature of women's virtue from the public nature of man's:

μέγα χειρεσίων ἀρετὰν

γυναῖκεις θείας Κώστης κρατητάν, ἐν ἀνδρόσα δ' αὐτὸ

κόσμου ἐνώ ό μεταμφιὴμες μεῖζον πόλιν αἰών.

(I A 568-72)

The quest for virtue is a great thing:

for women it is a secret quest concerned with love,

but for men, the good order innate in each nature

multiplies to make the city thrive.

A fragment of Sophokles warns women to keep their own shame closely concealed:

στυγχώρτε κανάχεσθε στυγχώρτε τὸ γὰρ

γυναῖκας αἰχμήν συν γυναῖκα δει στέγειν.

(fr. 679 P)

Cooperate, restrain yourselves in silence:

women have an obligation to cover up womanly shame.

Herodotos includes among his details of the bizarre, reversed world of the Egyptians (2.35) that these people knead dough with their feet, write from right to left, and send their women out for marketing, while the men stay home and work at the loom.

43In Xenophon's view it shames a man to stay at home (Oec. 7.2; 7.30); only artisans work indoors in shadow, sitting by the fire like women, and they are consequently effeminate (4.2). See also Plato, who specifies shadow-filled interiors as the domain of women (Charm. 16.36; Phdr. 239e); the Homeric Hymn to Demeter shows us women living in rooms full of shadow. Demeter sitting in shadow (96ff; 105ff); the Aiskhylean Athene dismisses the maternal role in her birth using the phrase "in the shadows of the womb" ἐν σκότους γυνῶν (Eum. 665); cf. the verb σκοτοποιεῖσθαι, which means "to rear in the shadow within doors" and in the passive "to live a sheltered, effeminate life" (c.g., Plato, Rep. 556d; Plut. Aemil. 31; Persius, Sat. 4.18.33). There appears to be some link between the shadowy environments where woman is at home and the deceit, doubleness, ambiguity, and error with which she is continually charged, from Pandora (Hesiod, Th. 570ff) onwards.

"Women are prone to secrecy and stealth," says Plato, "they are accustomed to creep into dark places and resist being dragged into the light" (Laws 6.781c). In Ilid 14, it is Hera who prefers to take cover for lovemaking, while Zeus is at ease in the open (cf. Apollo in Pindar's Ninth Pythium). Aristotle relates the inconstancy of woman to the fact that "she is naturally in such matters weaker than a man: a man's love is passionate and open; woman feels both desire and cunning" (Eth. 1149b14-19). Craftiness in general is regarded as a feminine specialty (see Aiskhylos, Ag. 1636; Plutarch, Mal. vir. 256b), and deceit in sexual matters as particularly the province of women, whose typical arts are metaphors for the
Xenophon describes the female slave quarters of the house as “set off from the men’s by a bolted door so that nothing could be carried off from inside which should not be carried off and so that the male servants might not beget children without our knowledge” (Oec. 9.5). Here we arrive at the core of male alarm on the subject of the pliancy and porousness of women. The core is sexual. A woman's sexual porousness poses a threat to the integrity of the oikos of which she is a part and to the integrity of the polis that encompasses this oikos. For this reason, adultery laws forbade a husband who had caught his wife in adultery to continue living in the same house with her. For this reason, women guilty of adultery were debarred by law from the public sacrifices. And this exclusion was necessary. Demosthenes explains, “in order that there not be pollutions nor sacrileges in the holy places” (ναὶ μὴ μιαρίατα μηδ’ ἀσεβήματα γύναικα ἐν τοῖς τερπίσιοι, Contr. Neer. 59.86). Clearly there is more involved in such a stipulation than outrage to male amour propre. Demosthenes is talking about the topography of sacred and profane. Adulteresses pose a spatial threat to the public hygiene of his city; their dirt is something they carry with them like a contagion.

WOMEN AS DIRT

What is pollution and how do women come by it? Dirt may be defined as matter out of place. The poached egg on your plate at breakfast is not dirt; the poached egg on the floor of the Reading Room of the British Museum is. Dirt is matter that has crossed a boundary it ought not to have crossed. For the ancient Greeks, as for many other cultures with complex systems of pollution belief, impurity is mixture. That which confounds categories or transgresses boundaries is polluting, that which is so confounded or transgressed is polluted and threatens to pollute others. Mary Douglas calls pollution “a particular class of dangers which are not powers vested in humans but which can be released by human action” and she describes a polluting person as one who “has crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.”46

Women are pollutable, polluted, and polluting in several ways at once. They are anomalous members of the human class, being imperfect men, as Aristotle informs us (GA 728a18–20; 737a25–35; 775a15). They are intimate with formlessness and the unbound in their alliance with the ensnaring wives of love (weaving, spinning, cooking). “Desire is crafty, like Aphrodite” says Aristotle (above). See also Padel (1983); Vernant (1974), 124–70.

46Douglas (1966), 113.

wet, the wild, and raw nature. They are, as individuals, comparatively formless themselves, without firm control of personal boundaries. They are, as social entities, units of danger, moving across boundaries of family and oikos, in marriage, prostitution, or adultery. They are, as psychological entities, unstable compounds of deceit and desire, prone to leakage. In sum, the female body, the female psyche, the female social life, and the female moral life are penetrable, porous, mutable, and subject to defilement all the time. So, when Aelian labels a woman “a wild animal more polluted than asp,” he goes on to explain that “an asp destroys with its poison but a woman has only to touch her victim to kill it” (NA 1.54). The female touch is a deadly crisis: pollution leaks out at the slightest contact.47

Women, then, are polluted because of a special tendency to go out of bounds, to lose their boundaries, to ally with the unbound. Aristotle tells us that the unbound is abhorrent because it is ἀσεβής (lacking in fulfillment or completion, GA 715b15–16). It is in her erotic life that woman most vividly lacks completion. Sexually the female is a pore. This porous sexuality is a floodgate of social pollution, for it is the gate of entry to oikos and polis. As soon as a maiden’s zone is loosened, immense possibilities of danger arise, upon which focus the alarm of men and the controlling instincts of society. The pores must be kept closed. The unbound must be bounded. The purity of all that lies within depends on it. A house or a society that does not take adequate measures to contain the leakage of its women is sailing the sea of life in a Melian boat, as the ancients might say. The expression “Melian boat,” connoting a proverbially leaky vessel, first arose in connection with a certain Hippotes who was sent out to found a colony. But the Melian men refused to sail with him. “They made excuses, some saying that the boats were leaking, others that their wives were unwell, and so they stayed behind. Hippotes then laid a curse on them: that they should never find a boat

47Abhorrence of mixture naturally surrounds the sexual act, “that loathsome commingling of male and female” as Parmenides calls it (B12 i/S). To engage in sex is “to mingle” (θηρίνεσθαι). The act itself defies by mixing, Plato implies when he designates as ἀσεβής (“pure”) prepubescent animals and humans who are κατά τον γάμον (“not tainted by marriage”), Laws 840d56. Demosthenes records the oath taken by priestesses of Dionysos, who commit themselves to lives “clean of congress with men” (ἄγνησε υπὸ τοῦ ἄνδρος τινός, Contr. Neer. 59–76). For Plutarch, diversity of sexual partners obstructs cleanliness and holiness. He urges married couples to keep themselves unpolluted (ἀγνέφωνας) by extramarital relations in order that the “nuptial sowing” (γιγάντια σπόρας) may be “as pure as possible” (ἰππόμενον, Coni. pr. 144b). Feminine sexuality particularly attracts loathing and mistrust, to the degree that the feminine nature more readily minglest and is mingled.
that was watertight, and that they should be ruled by women forever.\textsuperscript{48}
Hippotes' curse is a blow aimed at the very essence and sociocultural precondition of the ancient cosmos. Woman out of control is the danger, a boat filled with holes is its image. Hippotes is condemning Melian civilization to chaos.

PUTTING THE LID ON THE BRIDE

According to one ancient cosmology, the cosmos was first assembled out of chaos when Zeus threw a veil over the head of the goddess of the underworld and married her. So Pherekydes tells us (fr. 54 VS), and he goes on to describe the veil, on which were embroidered earth, ocean, and the houses of ocean—that is to say, the contours of the civilized world. Once veiled by her bridgroom, the dark and formless chthonic goddess was transformed and renamed Gê, goddess of the visible world, decorous and productive wife of Zeus.

I call attention to the cosmology of Pherekydes because it concerns the wedding of Zeus, important for our purposes insofar as the ancient wedding ceremony is one place where the theory of female pollution and the practice of pollution control can be seen to converge. We are introduced directly, in this cosmology, to the vestry code that regulates female decency in the ancient world and informs the sacred symbolism of the marriage rite. The head is its focus. Headgear is crucial to female honor, an index of sexual purity and civilized status.\textsuperscript{49} No decent woman is seen in public without her headress; only children, prostitutes, and maenads run about unveiled. The most common Greek word for female headgear is κρηβαλιον, whose symbolic force can be read from its threefold usage. Properly signifying a woman's "headband" (e.g., II. 22.470), κρηβαλιον is also used to mean "battlements of a city" (e.g., II. 16.110) and "stopper of a bottle" (e.g., Od. 3.392). It is plain what these three have in common. A corked bottle, a fortified city, a veiled woman are vessels whose contents are sealed against dirt and loss. To keep the lid on certifies purity.\textsuperscript{50}

Putting the lid on female purity was the chief concern and ritual point of the ancient wedding ceremony.\textsuperscript{51} So, in the cosmology of Pherekydes, Zeus marries the goddess of the underworld by bestowing on her a cosmic map of her own boundaries. So also, in the Attic legend of Kekrops' invention of marriage, we see masculine clarity and control imposed on a chaos of female promiscuity.\textsuperscript{52} This invention was part of Kekrops' transformation of the Athenian democracy into an exclusively male-dominated society, and of Athenian society into a patriarchy with descent through the male line. For Kekrops "found men and women having intercourse at random, so that no son could tell who his father was, no father who was his son" (schol. Aristophanes, Plut. 773). Kekrops accordingly devised the institution of marriage, to put an end to sexual license and clarify the lines of patrilineal descent; for this service he was regarded as a culture hero, who led the Athenians "out of savagery into civilization" (ἐκὼ ἀγρυπτός εἰς ἴμεροτητα, schol. Aristophanes,

\textsuperscript{48} Nagler (1974), 67, has proposed that the two ἁμαρτάλια ("attendants" or "ones going on either side") who accompany a respectable woman everywhere (e.g., II. 24.90–94; Od. 18.182–84) similarly betoken chastity, as if the two attendants were regarded as a surrogate personal boundary. An encircled woman is bounded against contact or leakage. A woman deprived of such encirclement is prey to seizure and rape (e.g., Homeric Hymn to Demeter 5; Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 117; Moschos, Eur. 28–32). The decorous Nausikaa even sleeps with a handmaiden on either side. When she must confront Odysseus unprotected by veil (cast off at 6.100) or companions (left behind at 6.139), Nausikaa maintains personal boundaries by "holding herself" (ἐπὶ δὲ ἀνασκόπησεν, Od. 6.141). This seems a variation upon the conventional feminine gesture of āsido, which is to "hold the veil in front or on either side of the face" (e.g., Od. 18.210). The sham sides of a whore perverts this gesture as it pollutes the veil she wears; so (according to the parodist Matron, cited by Nagler [1974], 67, n. 5) a hetaira enters the room "holding up to her cheeks her lightly veil" (ἐπὶ παραπέπαυσα κρηβαλιον φυσαλικα κρηβαλιον). The woman who has decided to abandon chastity compromises herself with oblique visual contact and action of the veil, e.g., Medea, moved by desire for Jason (Apollonios Rhodos, 3.444–45). The implied assumption of a decent woman's headgear with her battle against pollution is further signified by the word that Sappho (110 LP) and Hekataios (PGRHist 1.25) use for such covering: χειρομάκρυκνον, primarily "a cloth for wiping the hands after washing." Crawley (1927), 1.273, discusses the use of veils as protection against infecting others or being infected by evil influences. On the female κρηβαλιον, see further Marinatos (1967), 20–22, e.g., Abu-Lughod (1986); Anderson (1982); Makrouh (1979); Mason (1975); Mernissi (1987).


\textsuperscript{50} See Patterson (1986), 49–67, for a useful corrective to the treatment this myth has received from anthropologists.
function in the relation between the leaky vessel (the sieve in which bread is carried) and the good gift of bread itself that ritual calls forth from the leaky vessel. We should note that throughout the feasting and the distribution of bread, the bride remains very strictly veiled (παινὸν ἄκριβος ἐγκεκαλυμμένη, Lucian, Conv. 8), for it is not until the end of these events that the climax of the ceremony occurs. This is the moment when the bride rises or turns in her place and, facing her bridgroom and the men of his household across the room, takes off her veil.54

This action, called the anakalyptēria ("unveiling"),55 gives its name to the whole first stage of the wedding ceremony. It signifies the official consecration of the marriage; henceforth, the bride is considered to be married. The elaborate gifts given to the bride by the bridgroom at this stage were generally called "unveiling gifts" (τὰ ἀνακαλυπττίηα; but they had an alternate name, τὰ διαστρεβλα, and were so called, Pollux tells us, because they were regarded as "gifts given in exchange for taking away the virginity of the bride" (Pollux, 3.39; Amphis, fr. 49 Kock).

In other words, as far as the bride is concerned, the anakalyptēria is the decisive sacrificial action of the wedding. At the moment of unveiling, for the first time, the intact boundary of her person is violated by contact: the contact of vision. Ancient lexical sources leave no doubt that visual exposure was the function and official point of the anakalyptēria. "In order that she may be seen by the men" is the reason why the bride rises and unveils.56 Once she has done so, the glance of the bridgroom from across the room penetrates her opened veil. She is no longer parthenos ("maiden"). She is touched.

The bride at her anakalyptēria, as a participant in the cultural game of the wedding ceremony, may be compared with the supplicant reaching for the hand of his suppliant or the fugitive seating himself in the ashes of the hearth. Each of these is someone who flouts the rules of social interaction and propriety in order to submit himself or herself to the mercy of the opponent in the game. "The essence of the notion of sanctuary," Pitt-Rivers says, "is that it is a place where the 'normal"

54A red-figure loutrophoros in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts has recently been identified as depicting this moment in the wedding; Oakley (1982).
55Sources of information on the anakalyptēria include the lexical entries for this term in Harpokration, Hesychios, Pollux, and the Souda; Lucian, Conv. 8; Men., Dys. 855ff; Eur., IA 718–20; Bekker (1814–1821); Hiller von Gaertningen in RE, s.v. See also Bruckner (1994), 64; Cunningham (1984), 9–12; Mark (1984); Mayo (1973); Oakley (1982); Redfield (1982); Roberts (1978), 185–87; Sutton (1981); Toutain (1940), 345–53. I am indebted to Professors John Walsh and David Armstrong for various of these references.
56Ἀφθάσια ὧραθηνα; Souda; Harpokration, s.v. anakalyptēria.
rules of aggression and retaliation are laid in abeyance. Thus the supplicant or the fugitive deliberately takes up a position of utter abjectness, renouncing his power to affront the house, renouncing all agonistic relations with the owner(s) of the house, renouncing self-respect. Similarly, the bride voluntarily abases herself at the anakalypteria, exposing to the glance of her bridegroom the virgin state that veils have hidden until this moment. The relinquishing of her own honor lays a claim upon his honor. He is no less responsible than he would be to a supplicant or a guest to play out his side of the game by taking her into his heart and restoring the honor that she has freely forfeited. She has opened to him her boundaries; it is his charge to take her in and seal them anew. He does so immediately by offering her gifts, then by leading her away to his own oikos and enclosing her there.

We see in the ancient ritual of the wedding, then, the chief means by which the danger of women was used and defused. The act of marriage flouts boundaries of personal isolation that seal each person into his skin and each family into its oikos. To touch across boundaries means serious, dangerous leakage. Ritual defuses the danger by declaring it, celebrating it, facing it head on. “Taboo against connection is broken by making the connection,” as Crawley puts it. Ritual invites and enacts the paradoxes of a dangerous situation in order to exploit and reverse them, from isolation to contact, from exclusion to inclusion, from pollution to purity. The enactment is a cultural game in which someone from outside the oikos deliberately transgresses and pollutes it in order to provoke the oikos into absorbing him or her within it. Both players have winning cards to play (pollution of the oikos, sanctuary of the oikos), but virtuoso techniques of exploiting the rules allow each to play to a draw satisfying for all concerned. Readjustment of boundaries is the formal mechanism of such ritual gamesmanship. So the ancient wedding rite contrives to bring the inviolate bride into contact with her bridegroom, to touch what was untouchable, to veil and seal what was an exposed pore, to civilize and purify what was wild and polluted. Save for this ritual, ancient woman would be left hopeless as a Danaid in the underworld, with no prospect of sanctuary in a useful life, drops of water running down her hands.

57Pit-Rivers (1970), 867.
58An admonition found in lamblichos’ Life of Pythagoras, and also in the pseudo-Aristotelian Oikonomika, expresses this responsibility of the husband to his bride: “It is not right for the woman to pursue the man. For she is a supplicant. Therefore we do the leading from the hearth and the gesture of acceptance with the right hand” (SCA 85).
59The nuptial ceremony of the keraunopoieta undertakes to accomplish this, as I have argued in another context: Carson (1982).
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