

# The Feminine and Punctuation May Well Save the World

by Terre Spenser

“The world will be saved by the Western woman.”  
—The Dalai Lama, Vancouver Peace Summit 2009

An ambiguous pronouncement, what does it mean? I have been pondering that since it hit my Twitter feed during the 2009 summit. Was it just another demand for women to solve the messes created by the patriarchy? Frankly, I was more annoyed than inspired by this proclamation.

This year presented the deeply alarming war on women and, for me, the chance to revise and republish a paper that I had written in 2008 on the correct usage of punctuation; and, when adding the final touches to the paper—suddenly the Dalai Lama’s words had a new clarity. So, imagine saving the world with a mash-up of:

- The current political standpoint—specifically, the legislative war on women
- Rejecting the effects of patriarchy—specifically the madonna/whore split
- And, lastly:
- Correctly wielding punctuation—specifically, the slash—rightly known as the *virgule*

You might be wondering, “*Oh criminy, where is she going with this?*” Admittedly, right-wing politics, Jungian psychology and punctuation might be considered critical thinking *non-sequiturs*. I cannot imagine even one unanimously satisfactory menu that Rush Limbaugh, Marion Woodman and Grammar Girl would agree upon. Therefore, it is most unlikely, under any circumstances, that the trio would ever occupy the same public space. Not even Chez Pannisé’s well-nigh perfect menu would suit all three representatives of this mash-up.

To Jungians, the war on women and the madonna/whore split are obviously connected. The 2012 legislative war on women has introduced more non-Jungians (American women, especially), to Jungian concepts than at any time since Joseph Campbell was featured on the PBS series, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in 1988. Activist, feminist women have discovered the machinations of the madonna/whore complex as both psychic and political realities. They are studying Jung all over again and some are studying psychology for the first time.

While I do not believe that at any time in the past 6000 years any group (or groups) of men convened and decided to make the lives of women as unbearably miserable in as many

---

**Terre** discovered writing as a means to make mindspeace for her real passion: reading. And ever since, the two activities have been warring for her time. It is not always a peaceful co-existence, but it is never a dull one.

ways as they could imagine, that has been the precise effect of unbridled patriarchy.

One thing that the patriarchy has consistently done across the centuries and around the globe is to forcefully re-assert itself when anxiety strikes those in the uppermost reaches of the patriarchy’s power pyramid. It is the nature of patriarchy to distribute discomfort downwards while hoarding power upwards. Women live at the bottom of the pyramid worldwide. Financial and political anxiety on the part of the patriarchal mindset is predictably creating survival nightmares for the most vulnerable of women.

## *The War on Women:*

The war on women—that is, the over 1200 proposed and passed laws intended to limit and even deny women’s bodily autonomy—is, more accurately, a war on *disobedient* women. The patriarchy is desperately trying to reclaim its authority (power) over women. In morality-cloaked language, the message is that women who want to control their fertility should simply practice celibacy. Which is an indirect way of calling any contraception- or abortion-seeking woman a whore. Of course, Rush Limbaugh actually called Sandra Fluke a prostitute in February 2012 for seeking contraception coverage. The legislation merely implies it.

That legislation ranges from draconian restrictions on abortions (36 states); to ascertaining the ability of any medical or service personnel to deny contraception to customers/patients (20 states); to requiring that doctors lie to women who might opt for abortions (Kansas and Arizona); to forced unnecessary transvaginal, pre-abortion ultrasounds (six states); to declaring a woman pregnant two weeks before she ovulates (Arizona); to the Roman Catholic Church attempting to impose its religious patrimony on to the public at large by denying contraception coverage for all its 1.74 million US employees (national: hospitals, universities, etc.), even though most such employees are non-Catholic; and, *especially* since 98% of American Catholic women use birth control, just like every other American woman. In addition to these general outrages, there are specific cases of women being forced to give birth while shackled to hospital beds and other egregious attempts to control women’s bodies and fertility. What a tangle. What erupted?

Clearly the far right is trying to relegate women into lives that do not include reproductive agency or bodily autonomy. These misogynistic laws appear to be cruelly punitive and medieval. What possible social benefit is there to forcing women to have unwanted pregnancies and to bear unwanted children? The very ideologues passing these laws are completely and peculiarly opposed to providing for throngs of unwanted children and the life-threatening complications of pregnancy and childbirth onto unwilling mothers. Are they unaware of the consequences of such legislation?

Or is something else driving this policy?

What, then, is the patriarchal panic behind this madness? Let’s back up and take a look at the madonna/whore construct, created in the underbelly of the patriarchy.

## *Madonna/Whore:*

Madonna or whore—one or the other. A choice must be made—that is the reality of most women; indeed, the notion of the feminine itself has been bifurcated. She is defined as *either* a madonna—*or* she is defined as a whore. Although, she

was never in the conversation about terminology; nor did she participate in any negotiations about the outcomes of this imposed destiny. In truth, she never was allowed to define herself; she was defined from outside herself.

“The essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice.”

—Andrea Dworkin

**B**y dint of the prevailing culture, each generation receives and revivifies the patriarchy, generation after generation with astonishingly little change. Such is the psychic and political milieu in which we all swim.

At best, the origins of the madonna/whore split occurred in an attempt to understand the full circle of all things feminine. A splitting apart to understand the parts; and ultimately the whole, if you will. The origins of this division seem to have been forgotten along with the consciousness that there is a patriarchy at all. Truthfully, some have benefitted so handsomely from the patriarchy, that it perhaps rather behooved them to forget the original purpose and deny its existence.

The inability of those benefiting from patriarchal privileges to even see their own privileges eventually drove women into the open rebellion known as feminism. The first-wave feminists, (the original suffragettes, circa the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), simply wanted legal rights; they had little language to name and frame the inequities in which they lived. Although, a few first wave feminists actually wanted rights on all levels and the unshackling of all things patriarchal, (Mary Wollstonecraft and to a lesser degree, Susan B. Anthony), most of the energy was directed towards securing the right to vote for women; and to cease being the chattel of, first their fathers, and then, their husbands. That took about 100 years.

Harken to the 1960s when the second-wave of feminism arose: this feminism crafted language for the conditions that women experienced. Discourse and discussion developed among women. We named marital rape and sexual harassment. We identified objectification and gave scores of inequities names that are now in common and legal parlance. We fought for—and won—the rights to contraception, abortion, to work outside the home and, occasionally, to be paid equally for doing so. We won the right to compete in schools, in sports, to serve in the military, to have rapists and abusive spouses prosecuted and to determine our own lives to a much greater degree than ever before.

Second-wave feminists began defining themselves on their own terms—at least in part—and rejecting the patriarchal insistence that women be either the emotional caretakers of men vis-à-vis the madonna role, or be declared whores who were expected to absorb the overwhelming majority of patriarchal hatred and abuse.

The patriarchy grew quite agitated with women’s new unwillingness to accept providing to men lifelong emotional succor. It attempted to lure women back into madonnahood, which some tried, but that role no longer fit. No matter what their individual stories were, most women had encountered a fuller sense

of themselves. Although, many were seduced with material comforts and manipulations of elevated status, the madonna role was too small for most women to inhabit.

Meanwhile, the patriarchy responded with online gonzo pornography; therefore creating an unlimited supply of virtual whores. Dr. Gail Dines best defines gonzo porn: “...the biggest moneymaker for the \$100 billion porn industry—which depicts hard-core, body-punishing sex, in which women are represented as dehumanized commodities who enjoy torture, violence and humiliation...” And, despite the fact that most porn users claim to be using erotica, over 90% of online porn involves violence against women *and* contempt for the obvious pain of the performers.

Sex trafficking rose as well. A greater percentage of people are enslaved now—both sexual and forced labor, the vast majority of whom are women—than there were when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. At least the patriarchy’s hatred of women is out in the open now, it simply cannot be denied by any thinking person.

Alongside gonzo porn, came the right-wing foot stomping that women re-conform their idea of what women should be; thereby supplying men with an equally abundant supply of madonnas. ‘Cept, it didn’t work.

And the greatest patriarchal secret of all was revealed to the non-Jungian public at about the same time: that the opposite of man is *not* woman; the opposite of man is *boy*. The notion that males *should* emotionally tend themselves without using women along the way is a late twentieth century concept.

The patriarchy has, historically, tortured, maimed, raped, enslaved and murdered women it deemed whores (or witches) for the crime of not providing the emotional comfort that the patriarchy proscribed. The ability of any man to accuse any woman of whoredom exists to this day. A surfeit of madonnas allows men—and animus-possessed women—to remain emotionally immature. Who wants to grow up if that can be avoided, Peter Pan? Nice to have a lot of Wendy’s around.

This current spate of legislation is but the latest patriarchal temper tantrum in reaction to the actuality that there are just not enough Wendys (read: madonnas) to perform the patriarchy’s bidding. We are left to presume that the supply of whores is ample. Or, at least digitally reproduced in sufficient numbers to avert a supply crisis.

### *Back to the War on Women—*

**J**ungian analyst Ginette Paris writes in *The Sacrament of Abortion*, “...feminine power is a set of contradictions—the power of life *and* death. The feminine’s life-giving, protective powers cannot function properly if she does not possess full power, namely, the power over death as well as life.”

Full feminine power terrifies the patriarchal mind. Those minds prefer a bifurcated feminine: “Those whores who defy us with birth control and abortion must be made to suffer,” is the unwritten part of the 1200+ pieces of legislation that have rained upon women in every state in the past seven months. The legal roar commanding women surrender their reproductive rights to the patriarchy is an infantile demand for comfort—to shield grown men, especially powerful men—from the emotional demands of adulthood.

So, the patriarchal threats increase in severity and scope: should a woman become pregnant because she is having surviv-

al sex, (sorry, but that is the reality for many poor women), or raped or incested—then she must be forced to show her pregnant self to the world and then we will thereupon call her a whore. Furthermore, forced pregnancy will be imposed upon all women by means of denying women contraception. Thus spake the patriarchy. We hear you loud and clear, old patty-poo. Yes, we do.

The unspoken, and unwritten, patriarchal demand is actuality for a greater number of available madonnas. And no tactics are too extreme, too grotesque to employ. The patriarchy is growing miserably uncomfortable. This is all the Wendys' fault, of course. She must be made to understand her first obligation is to provide succor. And provide it now, damnit.

Women, for the most part, have absorbed the overt and covert patriarchal threats; we have internalized them and are many times made to live in fear of our lives and survival. And yet, instead of becoming madonnas, women are in even more open radicalized rebellion. If there was a response to this infantile legislation, it would be: "Grow up, Peter Pans, and learn to relate *with* us. We have given enough, thank you very much, and we refuse your definitions of us."

*Uh. Oh.*

Politically, this is probably not going to go too terribly smoothly. For anyone. Women are not going to give back their bodily autonomy, even if it is legally mandated. Personally, there will be many friendships and relationships lost in the divide. Intra-psychically, we all have a great deal of housecleaning to do, beginning with refusing the internal madonna/whore chasm in one's Self (or anima).

The fearsome goddess Kali will certainly redefine the feminine—but not everyone is comfortable with a wholesale jettisoning of the Judeo-Christian framework. However, any re-framing is better than none at all.

*Punctuation (At Last!)*

Madonna/whore, madonna-*virgule*-whore. The *virgule* is an utterly unique punctuation mark, it is a contra-mark, it can mean the word *or*; and, albeit much less frequently, the *virgule* can mean *and*.

Like the contranym, *cleave*, which can mean either to separate or to join together, the *virgule* can express both a separation from and a joining with. Slashes can join lines of poetry and combine ideas. The humble slash does something that no other mark does: it indicates two opposite forces. No period means anything other than the completion of an idea; to present a partial idea requires a different mark entirely. No question mark signifies both certainty and inquiry. Not so with the bi-directional slash.

**A Note:** From here on out, when I say 'woman' I mean the anima in men and the woman herself in women. Make whatever meaning you want of the preceding text.

*Disobedience*

Disobedient women live bloody, messy, emotional and full-bodied *and*-type lives. They make the *virgule* a mark of union in utter delight of crafting a full-circled feminine life—

even if the patriarchy labels that defiant and brands them as whores.

Disobedient women refuse over-socialization and have keen discernment. They seek definitions of their own makings and disregard all imposed definitions. They know that what has been done to the feminine has been done to the planet itself. And that the feminine, our psyches and the earth are near tipping points.

They know that the patriarchy despises disobedient women. Of course, this hurts them deeply, but they are not deterred. They dig deep within themselves and recover their sexuality from the splitting *virgule* and mend their whore to madonna or madonna to whore. You see, to disobedient women, it doesn't matter. Their bodies remember being burned as witches, tried as blasphemers and being violently beaten and raped. They can still hear the contempt of being called whore. And they remember the hollowness of the false adoration as madonnas.

Disobedient women know that women are prostituted because they have no other choices in the patriarchy. They know that the prostituted suffer torture for all women and they feel a deep sisterhood with them.

They know the agony of being left and they know the necessity of leaving. No matter which side of the *virgule* she came from, disobedient women endeavor to make the *virgule* a union, and are both amused and outraged by patriarchal divisiveness.

Yes, that means she wants access to birth control. Oh, and abortion, also. She wants all women to have bodily integrity without overt and covert threats, repressive laws, religious structures, fawning promises of adoration if *only* women will embrace the role of madonna. No more manipulations. No more either/or.

***A Caveat to the Dalai Lama's Pronouncement:***

*Only if we are very, very disobedient.*

I am pretty certain that the Dalai Lama knows full well that women have to defy the patriarchy to save the world—and that Western women are the most likely of all women to disobey.

***Why Disobedience?***

Why refuse the madonna/whore division? Because we cannot enjoy the feminine's protective, life-giving powers if she is cleaved. Because our psyches and the world itself now depends upon re-uniting the contradictory powers of the feminine. Meet you at the *virgule*; we have a world to save.

"In the face of suffering, one has no right to turn away, not to see." —Elie Wiesel