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THE FEMININE AND WHOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

and

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THE MUTE VOICE, THE DEAF EAR, WOMEN WRITING

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THE FEMININE AND WHOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Josephine Newman O.P.

The search for a true understanding of spirituality is perhaps one of the most difficult of human endeavours. Yet it has most powerfully and actively engaged the human spirit throughout its long history. Drawn by a magnetic centre the human spirit reaches towards a point of transcendence that opens it to the immanent heart of all life. Spiritual writers speak of this movement as an inner journey, a soul journey. Its focus is the world of inner awareness, that "interior awareness that leads humanity into relationship to God, the Creator."(1)

Reflection on interior awareness, however, is difficult. Nowhere is the possibility of self-deception more readily activated. This is true not only at an individual level but at a cultural and historical level also. In our present day world, at each of these levels, we tend to think of our inner awareness of life as running alongside our outer concrete and practical life. We easily disconnect each from the other and invariably we judge the authenticity of the inner in terms of the outer. We do this, of course, not only in the context of spirituality but in all areas of reflective thought. It is our heritage of philosophical dualism: thought is inside, an inner reality; feelings are inside, inner shadows of reality. Words and actions are their concrete expression and we must judge them by these. In our contemporary life we have increasingly reduced the world of inner knowing to silence except as measurable in and by such external criteria. But the old spiritual adage: "By their fruits you shall know them" may not be a verdict on this fate of the inner world but an invitation to open to an inner knowing of life. Only when we truly engage life's inner core will we know how to recognize and evaluate its outward expression.

I

How then can we portray this inner aspect of life without falling into the trap of dualistic thinking? Can we understand soul-life as a journey, a story of human life as it weaves the fabric of its own life? This is our task as we try to avoid the pitfalls our dualistic thought structures have set us. It is also our task if we are to reconnect wholistic experiences and our sense of spirituality.
The human life-story is viewed today in a context of 'consciousness'. In our post-Hegelian and post-Freudian world the centrality of the conscious self in the life of the person has been relativized; the scene of consciousness has been radically altered. With it life's story uncovers new depths of psychic experience and threatens the claim of mind and will to absolute rule. The sense of our human essence calls to us for deeper self-knowledge and enlarged self-understanding. An emerging vision of human consciousness as we move in this direction points to life as an unfolding essence within the confines of space and time yet manifesting transcendent qualities and possibilities. We can distinguish two levels in this progression of life: the first and basic level relates to the world of natural experience, the world of objective consciousness. We know this world in our everyday life. It is the world of space-time, human projects and achievements, the world which human beings perceive objectively and master with their mind and will. The second level relates specifically to the inner knowing of our human essence. This knowing forms our store of human wisdom which reveals the transcendent sense of life. In philosophical terms it is the knowledge that springs from radical existential awareness.(2)

It is to this second level of human consciousness that I wish to turn to ground the deep sense of the feminine. For the feminine mode of being opens us to this self-transcendent knowing. This might well be contested by both philosophers and theologians who claim rights and patronage of our storehouse of human wisdom, and this claim may be justified in a manner of speaking. But our philosophical and theological traditions have long since ceased to nourish individuals' living encounter with their own existential issues. For the human encounter is essentially a story involving the experience of birth and death, creation and destruction, love and hate, happiness and misery. The sense of this story can be stifled - even killed - in a world where philosophical analysis and conceptualization hold sway. And this is what has happened to our philosophical traditions. The difficulty, however, is not with rational reflection as such. It is with the overriding significance the rational has assumed in the halls of patriarchal philosophical reflection. There the question of existential meaning may still be the focus of attention.(3) But the conscious mind, identified as the seat of all reflection, sets the meaning and context of that question. Worse still, it constructs a conceptual framework to answer questions that do not, in themselves, point to an answer.(4)

One might say here that I am confusing levels of knowledge and reiterate the claim that philosophy alone deals directly with existential issues. But in itself conceptualization reduces the world of meaning to its own rational form and context. Philosophy, as we know it in a patriarchal culture, tends to confine itself to this. But life's meaning stretches beyond the rational and conceptual to the broader horizons of intelligible structure. The
experience of the intelligible is at the heart of human life. But it rests more essentially in intuitive wisdom than in rational reflection in which we try to express it. Each is not opposed to the other, however. But there is an order and balance which each must respect in the other. In our patriarchal intellectual climate that order and balance has fallen by the wayside. The rational has overpowered and suppressed the intuitive. The conscious ego or self, assuming a rational identity, claims absolute territorial control in a reality that is only partly conscious and can be powerfully unconscious.

Unhappily this reality is reflected in our world as we face it today. Our power of conscious rational control is collapsing under its own pressure. The power of the unconscious - the hoped-for burial ground of our personal and collective repression - has long since pressed for expression and integration. The way to such integration lies in developing a sense of presence to the deeper layers of consciousness which rational intellection of itself must exclude. Nor is this a movement to embrace the irrational in place of the rational. It is a movement to enlarge the sense of self to include the intuitively intelligible as an integral part of our unfolding human essence.

When, however, we move to the world of the intuitively intelligible we must temporarily suspend our propensity to engage in linear reasoning. For here we are in a world of immediate experience of life. The word of that world is not rationally descriptive; it is intelligibly imaginative. It finds expression in story, in myth and in symbol. Here the feminine dimension gives life its true grounding. For the feminine mode of being is a sense of presence in the immediacy of experience. It is an inner knowing of life's unfolding essence. This actual presence, however, has little to do with what we typically associate with male and female. It points rather to an archetypally formed psyche which shapes, in some way, the direction we give our life.(5)

From the archetypal perspective the emergence of the feminine at this time in our history heralds the return of an essential order and balance in the human psyche. Its implications extend not only to our value system but to our way of knowing and of being. It takes root in a context where patriarchy has run its course. Patriarchy, the era of father and ruler, had creative possibility when it focussed our psyche in the direction of spirited leadership and organization of life's external forces.(6) But as leadership gave way to external ownership and inspiration gave way to aggressive desire for power and control the age-old dynamic of oppressor and oppressed gradually took root. The external form of that inner process is the story of society as our history records it today. But hidden beneath the external form of that history is the inner story of the emergence and then destruction of an inner possibility of life.
It is in the psyche of women that the impact of that story is most poignantly expressed. In concrete life woman became the symbol of that which needed to be controlled and repressed by the rule which men claimed as their own. So it is from women who today stand oppressed in their womanhood that the story of rebirthing the feminine has begun. It is not because of what women are (equal in human capability to men) but of what they symbolize about life that the key to their oppression is to be found. Their very mode of being, in an archetypal context, symbolizes wisdom. Wisdom, sophia, the feminine. It is truly remarkable that even in our patriarchal world the idea of wisdom is archetypally identified as feminine. The wisdom of God is the feminine face of God; it can be found in the feminine face of life. The deepest 'sin' of patriarchy is that it bound and repressed that feminine face of life.

II

In our western culture the woman of the twentieth century has become acutely aware of her subjection in a patriarchal society. The decision to rebel against the roles and status traditionally assigned to her was but the beginning of a deeply transformative life-process. This life process is gradually but powerfully pervading the sense and shape of her life. To this woman it became obvious fairly quickly that true liberation was not just a matter of proving woman the equal of man but of proving woman the equal of her womanhood. For it was her sense of womanhood that bore the wounds of oppression, not her capacity to work and take active responsibility in life. Woman would surely never doubt her capacity to do and to accomplish - her hidden everyday story was a record of such events. But what she learned to doubt over thousands of years was her value as being, both in herself and in society. That doubt pervaded her sense of worth in the work and accomplishments to which her being gave expression. To retrieve that sense of worth and value in herself marked a path of rediscovery of and deep reconnection with the sources of her life. In discovering for herself the inner face of enforced inferiority she would rediscover her true roots and resourcefulness. In reconnecting with these she would learn to value and develop the open possibilities they offer to life. The route to liberation, in this sense, was set to undermine the patriarchal controls which woman had long since taken into herself. Her more powerful oppressor, she came to realize, was her own self, her doubt about her values, her resources and about her real importance. She had come to accept her stereotype identity: she readily believed herself to be inferior, illogical, passive, capricious and, in every other important respect, of less value than men. A prisoner in herself she at length set herself the task of breaking her bonds asunder.
A question arises here about the connection between this inner story of woman and the feminine archetype. The feminine as archetype, let us remember, is an unconsciously held type or motif in the life of our psyche and as such has no specific content. But it finds expression concretely in the conscious lives of individual females and males, women and men. This is not, however, a relationship of correspondence between female and feminine and between male and masculine. This commonly held and feared assumption is a distortion of an archetypal reality. Rather it is a matter of female and male, in their different sexual identities, actively integrating and expressing both feminine and masculine ways of being. There is a qualitative way of being which we describe as feminine and a qualitative way of being which we describe as masculine. The maturing process in the human person depends on an appropriate integration and expression of both as modes of being and becoming.(7) Our focus here is with the feminine mode of being and becoming. What does it typify in the realm of our conscious life? Essentially it relates to what we might call the energy of connection. It forms a connective link with one's inner being. On it depends our ability to be alive at the core of oneself, to be alive to the sense of life's unfolding mystery in oneself. It senses and responds to the movement of life beyond the boundaries our conscious ego sets and opens us to the experience of self-transcendence. In eastern traditions this mode of being is associated with yin, with right brain, intuitive modes of presence.(8) The masculine mode of being, by contrast, is associated more with yang, with left brain linear type reasoning.

It is not clear how and if women as such are essentially more connectively interior and more intuitive (yin) than men. But it certainly seems clear that women in the lived atmosphere of their lives today are, de facto, more open, accepting and in touch with inwardly connective values than are men. Their natural and historically conditioned sense of birthing, bonding and of nurturing have intensified women's power of relating to the deeply personal sense of life. Their knowing at that level carries an energy of presence to the other that is not generally experienced by men. That quality of womanly presence and response to the other must surely have its source in feminine archetypal energy. What this and related values mean to particular women today is far from clear. But what these values offer to life and society as we have it today is the possibility of humanizing the increasing threat of the impersonal as a dominating force in our lives. This was not possible when women were confined to the family and helpmate roles in life. But the move beyond the confines of patriarchal consciousness now bids them open these values to wideranging creative life developments. The era of the so-called 'soft' virtues
is gone. This stereotype identification must yield to an integrative process that will collapse a false polarization between women’s and men’s traditional roles. Only then can we begin again to envision that point where feminine and masculine modes of being can meet in a unifying expression of life.

But this is a vision pointing to the future. Its beginnings rest focally with women today, with every form of re-empowering to which the sense of womanhood can open. It is our hope that the values they now carry for life will creatively develop and so open a sense of feminine presence in our world. Then both women and men will redirect their journey of life to include the forgotten experience of life’s self-transcending function. In so doing they will open again to the experience of other. This is the human experience that leads to wisdom, the moment of encounter with the Other. Patriarchy, in the course of its history, settled for the reality of the rational ego. It controlled and regulated its inferior functions. As such it became self-enclosed and it limited its possibility of a self-transcending experience. The liberation of our human psyche from this repressive stronghold summons us to this movement of self-transcendence. Our models of rationality with their controlling systems of thought and structures must yield to an enlarged sense of self and to the intuitively intelligible on which that sense of self stands.

III

To view the story of woman and patriarchy from the perspective of the feminine is to focus on the inner aspect of the human journey. The life of spirit, of course, does not depend on human experience as such. But human soul-experience at its deepest level is an expression of a search for its own spiritual dimension. The story of that experience has a psychological aspect. We have journeyed through the ages and we know and sense that journey in our myths, our symbols and our images. In our own time when psychologists have uncovered deep-structure levels of human motivation we can reflect again on that journey and see something of its hidden significance. Woman's story is especially telling in this respect. For the age-old oppression of woman points directly to a level of deeply hidden motivation. There is, of course, no clear analysis of what that motivation might be. But hidden motivation is surely a significant part of our patriarchal story through the ages. Our question then might be: what can we sense of the form and inner significance of the oppression of women in our patriarchal age? As inner story of human life what direction can we take to move beyond the limits of patriarchal consciousness?
The story of patriarchy is by now familiar reading indeed. We need but recall very briefly certain points of significance as we focus on the images of life it construed. In the traditions which most influenced our own the right to woman as the property of man (Hebrew tradition) was clearly established. So, too, was the belief in her essentially inferior nature (Greek tradition). Gradually as our western Christian tradition took form these belief structures were grounded in a philosophical-theological explanation of life. In our medieval world this became the basis of our God-structure, Church-structure and society-structure. In essence it was a synthesis of Hebrew biblical tradition and Greek natural reason tradition. Both were baptized in the font of Christian revelation. But the idea of woman and the symbols of her value, in that synthesis, were determined and dictated by the thought structure of men. The voice of woman's inner experience had been choked in this analysis of life. (9)

The medieval story of reason, however, yielded gradually to a story of rationalistic control. It quickly submerged the ideal of reason itself in its bid for dominance. (10) In this the sense of unity of life on which reason was anchored gave way to a dualism in which rationality controlled its inferior rivals. The rivals within the human psyche were the feelings, senses and the instincts. These motivational power houses of life's inner thrust were subjected to a superior rational power. That rational power reflected men's rational image of a rational God. The model of woman in this mechanistic worldview was imaged in the likeness of life's inferior function. Her values, likewise, reflected an inferior, though essential, level in a rationally controlled life.

But what of the inner story of these outer manifestations? What of the unconsciously held motivation which pushed forward this line of thought? With hindsight and psychological insight one can suspect a growing need to control and repress this level of life's inner resources. Reason's struggle for dominance suggests an inner dynamic which gradually subjected to itself the affective and imaginative well-springs of human thought. The power of connective belonging to life from which all our most basic aspirations and questions arise was gradually crushed at its source. The practice and the art of intuitive and imaginative knowing had lost its place in the realm of human thought and the organization of life. Woman's inferior status became, willy nilly, the external sign and symbol of that loss.

Why patriarchal consciousness developed in this way remains mysterious indeed. Those who follow a Jungian line of thought will tend to view the patriarchal phase as a necessary step in the
The process of reconnecting with these missing dimensions of our conscious experience is what we mean by a feminine perspective. To date it is mostly women who are moving in its direction. But it is not a process for women alone. It is, in essence, an inner thrust towards wholistic experience as the basis for a fully human life. Beyond the present movement, springing from women in general and from some few men in particular, there lies the cultural need to enliven our soul's connection with our stories, our symbols and our myths. These newer sources of meaning need to reopen our rational controlling selves.

The human psyche or soul knows most immediately the language of imagination. We come to know our soul-journey through story, symbol and myth. In the Hebrew biblical tradition this cultural form was held sacred. So it is likely that a feminine perspective on life was maintained at that level. Perhaps, because of this, there had a stronger identity and value than a subsequent historical perspective would allow us to see? Yet her inferior status as the property of man was already a step towards disconnecting the sense of feminine presence in life. In the earlier Christian centuries the world of imagination gradually lost its ground as a power of disclosing meaning. Imagination was then subjected to reason as the arbiter of human truth. Perhaps this will be seen as a 'reasonable' move which has proven itself our strength? Perhaps it was. But only if we choose an ideal of mind rather than one of soul. The subsequent story of reason in the western world is impressive indeed. But who can doubt our loss of human soul? The rational, controlling, achieving, goal-oriented ego feeds on reason's domination. Yet because of its dominating, power-craving energy it loses touch with its inner wellsprings of self-transcendence.

In our desire for self-transcendence lies our creative possibility of life and of relationship with God. In psychological terms the experience of a self-transcending moment is the soul's surrender to the presence of all life. It is a living sense of unity in multiplicity. It moves us beyond a rationally controlled, separative, distancing ego towards a deeper level of selfhood. In all our spiritual and mystical traditions we know this to be the moment of divinity as it discloses its presence immanently in life.
NOTES


3. This is especially so in the European existential tradition. In recent times theology has aligned itself strongly with this tradition.


5. Archetypes are associated with the psychology of C.J. Jung. Some schools of feminist thought, especially in the US, approach issues about womanhood from an archetypal perspective. I myself resonate with this approach. But there are other ways and other levels of approaching these issues.


12. A helpful study of this line of thought can be found in AVENS R (1980) *Imagination is Reality* Ann Arbor Michigan: Braun-Brumfield Inc.

13. James Hillman, writing from a psychological perspective, points to the Councils of Nicaea, 787 and of Constantinople, 869, as the decisive historical moments when this change occurred. He writes: "...at that Council of Constantinople the soul lost its dominion. Our anthropology, our idea of human nature, devolved from a tripartite cosmos of spirit, soul and body (or matter), to a dualism of spirit (or mind) and body (or matter). And this because at that other Council, the one in Nicaea 787, images were deprived of their inherent authenticity." From Peaks and Vales. In Puer Papers (1974) Texas: Spring Publications p 54.
"And life, what is that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain."

Virginia Woolf
The Voyage Out

"I do not feel this tension when I am writing, I am at ease in the diary. When will creation and life fuse for me, and when will I be equally at ease with both?"

The Journals of Anais Nin
Vol 5

The Bomb hangs over us.

Death is so real that we ignore it. We are afraid to look at megaton death. We can all vanish, at the press of a button, but this time the furniture will not remain. Women have always been vanishing, appearing and disappearing again. We receive approval if we listen, we are muted when we speak.

Death is no longer the sister of birth, part of the natural circular rhythm. Death is out of proportion. We play games with it on our television screens, war toys are a must for children. Sex automatically linked with violence. Real death and birth are taboo, sterilized, in the hands of 'specialists' touched with rubber gloves, in high tech control. The scientist is creeping into the womb. We desire mastery of that vessel. Breasts are not for milk. Culture prefers the bottle. Women over centuries have learned to slip snake-like into many skins, camouflage for survival. Or vanish. The 'Expert' holds the bomb with tweezers. Holds the energy of death, the death of Energy.

"War is the most terrifying example of energy directed against ourselves," says Laura Huxley in You Are Not The Target. But then she also says, "A work of art is a clear example of energy used creatively."
Energy. Women carry the space for a child. We hold this potential in our pelvises. Creative energy is natural to us. To use. Not to use, to respect, to give pain, to groan about, to hate, to be removed, to grieve for. To fear. To mark time by, to be controlled by, to give energy birth.

The culture we inhabit is not a woman's culture. We did not control its formation, we will not control its possible destruction. Our words beat against these walls with their fists. We beat to stay alive. But, there is also a great silence.

Our energy and our anger is often speechless, so turns back in on ourselves. Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Marina Tsvetayeva, and many others, took their own lives. "We have had enough of suicidal woman poets, enough suicidal woman, enough of self-destructiveness as a soul form of violence permitted to women." (Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets and Silence). But is it not rather, the last desperate attempt these women have made at control of self. In a culture that denies women control of themselves?

"Before the woman's movement, I felt that I, too, was faced with those same three choices: commit suicide, work in isolation, or accept the absence of recognition," says Judy Chicago in Through the Flower, My Struggles as an Artist. "And who can fight against despair?" says Emily Bronte.

The Bomb hangs.

Anne Lovett died in childbirth at a plaster virgin's feet. There was a witch hunt in the case of the Kerry Babies. All over the country statues of the Virgin Mother were seen to move. Teenage girls see apparitions in the clouds. We are more fragmented than ever. Unemployment rises. Painters cover huge canvases. Walls covered with screams. The bomb is male.

"Destructiveness is a sign of impotence," says Anais Nin in her diaries (Vol 2). She wished to create "without those proud delusions of man, without megalomania, without schizophrenia, without madness."
The apple is cut in half, the core, the pips:

Anais wanted her art to "...be closest to the life flow I must install myself inside the seed, growth, mysteries...."

We are split from ourselves by a culture that dangles false selves for us to wear, we are handed masks: Oh sexy/doll/goddess, (young woman) habit/useful/joke/dependable/boring/(Mother Wife)
interfering/joke/ridicule, (Mother-in-Law,)
plain/dry/trigid/lifeless, (Spinster) old/fussy/fool/duty,
(Grandmother) ugly/smelly/sexless/useless/wills/money, (Old woman)
dirty/lust/ashameless, (Prostitute).
Women are now in the process of reclaiming some of these words and titles, but as Susie Orbach says in 'Fat Is A Feminist Issue,' "alternatively deified and devalued it is hard for her to feel secure about her own responses." We write and paint to know the split. To heal. To protest. We fight for ourselves as we write, we write to save ourselves. We write to celebrate.

"Every woman who writes is a survivor." (Tillie Olsen)

The poet speaks from her conscious and unconscious responses. "But poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know... (Adrienne Riche, On Lies Secrets and Silence, Essay When We Dead Awaken). The voice of the woman poet in this country is muted because we are unsure of the truth of our own responses as this culture is constantly undermining women's responses and giving them no validity. Also we are not in contact with our heritage, our history as poets.

"The struggle to be female and self-defined is hard, with few supports for an expression of true female personhood," says Susie Orbach, and again she says: "To observe an aspect of self which has been rejected time and time again requires a good deal of self acceptance. Turning off of one's judges..." Female experience of life differs from male so the content of our creative work can be different, but this lack of understanding and support for our female personhood in our culture causes us to lack trust in our own experience.

We lack faith in ourselves. Belief in our voice.
Judy Chicago says "I knew, through my study of women's work that it was primarily the content that differentiated women's work from that of men's when there was a difference. This realization helped me affirm one of my own impulses as an artist - to make work openly subject-matter orientated (while still being abstracted) and to try and reveal intimate emotional material through my forms."

As we are in the process of redefining ourselves, we will as writers, maybe subconsciously be redefining our use of language. How can we know the language we use is our own? We don't know. It will only be by trial, experiment, effort, reading women's work past and present, opening our responses as clearly as we can, emotionally, intellectually, physically and with imagination, that we will move to find out. It means taking risks.

Dale Spender in her book Man Made Language explores the fact that the English language is sexist "...many feminist writers who have tried to articulate the difficulties encountered in trying to encode feminist reality have also, directly and indirectly, referred to the phenomenon of being confined to the words of the dominant group, and of "having to try to tell our truths in an alien language" (Rich, On Lies Secrets and Silences). We will understand more through the passage of time, as the changes of this new perception of ourselves works on our psyche, filters through our systems and becomes part of us, we will sift the real from the unreal.

As the past is heavily weighted on the side of his-story not her-story we have been denied access to female role models. When I was a student painter at Art School at University in England, the painter Gwen John was the only female artist presented to us as a model. Consider the effect if the reverse had been the case. How would the male students have reacted if nearly one hundred per cent of the works of art they were educated through were by women?

In literature the balance is only slightly better. Here, we have a handful of women publishing poetry in Ireland. The 'image' of the poet in Ireland is male. There are 'exceptions' and, as Dale Spender's research into the language shows, 'the norm' is male, so the female is 'abnormal'. As an exception you are labelled on the outside of the way, not part of the main (male) voice. We are not included in the male club. They turn the deaf ear. We are not part of the human race? We don't want to race, we want to be, to be-come.
"I don't want to write. I want to live." (Katherine Mansfield, Letters and Journals). But she wrote to live as she struggled with ill health and died at the age of thirty four.

With the threat of nuclear war we work and live under tension, so at a time when human existence was never more precarious women are discovering and reclaiming their power, their past, and moving into their future. "When will creation and life fuse for me, and when will I be equally at ease with both?" asks Anais Nin. Perhaps never.

The threat of a war of extinction hovers over all.

In nuclear death, if the button is pressed (it will not be a female finger who presses it), all will vanish. These possibilities are similar in emotional impact to the threat of plague in the past, or the reality of the fires of hell in the middle ages. Women's dis-ease with creation and life is increased or caused by the tension of living in a patriarchal culture which is non-affirming to their creativity and rights as full persons.

Women are closer to the natural tension between birth and death. Birth, because we give it. Death, because we (more often) hold the hand. And clear up the mess. There is one tension that writers and painters cannot lose.

The tension of the white page. The stark white canvas that is already a perfection in simplicity, on which words or colours go, to create the chaos from which new forms are made. This necessary tension that empowers us to create, gives hope and the determination that our voices will sing.

The poetic voice in Ireland has been a diminished one. Only half a voice. The male half. Only a few women have had their work published. Now, at last, more women are bringing their poems 'out'. Could it be that, men's fear in the face of our power of childbirth, in which they play so small a part, causes them to deny its importance by their laws and/or deify it as the 'Holy Family' or 'The Mother' thus again putting us apart, lesser, godlike, but therefore unreal, unchangeable, but also animal. So his male genius, his creation, his Works of Art, are 'masterpieces'; and we who can make the whole child and as well create works of art, 'mistresspieces,' that cannot be allowed, or faced, for if it was, how could he ever compete?
Intensity is the pressure that causes a poem to be made. A poem speaks in link with the past, shooting out to the future. Uses ritual and magic, the chant, the rune, sacred and profane, the ballad, the jingle. Using modes and forms that press forward but grow from past roots. It is the personal voice, the voice crying in the wilderness, sacred, religious in a primal sense, which combines madness and order, defies and obeys, seeks always for fullness, to be made Whole.

Today we are acutely conscious of our lack of wholeness and refuse to stay silent in the face of a society that denies us the opportunity to shape it for our needs; that pushes away our contributions, or decries them as lesser. Women are insisting on space; to think, to imagine, to live, to be respected, recorded, to be seen, and, to be heard.

Nora

I have another duty, just as sacred.

Helmer

You can't have. What duty do you mean?

Nora

My duty to myself.

Helmer

Before everything else, you're a wife and mother

Nora

I don't believe that any longer; I believe that before everything else I'm a human being - just as you are - or at any rate I shall try to become one.

(From A Doll's House. Henrik Ibsen)
UCD WOMEN'S STUDIES FORUM

...was founded in 1983 by women staff and students with the primary objective of stimulating and developing women-centred research, teaching and learning. The Forum provides women throughout the College and in the wider community with the opportunity and space needed to explore ideas and opinions, to pursue research interests, and to develop resources for both teaching and scholarship.

The Women's Studies Forum seeks to reach across and beyond the traditional dividing lines - between disciplines, between students and teachers, between staff in different sectors in the university. Very importantly, the Forum seeks to reach out and join with women in the wider community, whose insights, experiences and diverse practice are crucial to its growth.

The Forum organises fortnightly Research Seminars, regular lunchtime talks and discussions, an annual series of literary readings, and also holds three or four one-day seminars on specific themes during the course of the year.

Women's Studies Forum events are normally open to both women and men, students and all staff, and to the general public.

For further information about events and the work of the Forum please contact:

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