INTRODUCTION

Thesis Proposal

The dormant realisation that motherhood affected the lives of almost every woman in some way dramatically sprang to life when I gave birth to my son ten years ago. In the different experiences of the joy and pain of watching him grow into strong bodied personhood, my own perceptions expand accordingly, and I am now able to recognise the cyclical nature of the creative process with thanksgiving and respect. However, I continue to wonder why there seems to be little evidence that the values and perspectives experienced in the mothering process, in fact the process itself, seem to go by as an invisible and therefore an un-notorworthy ‘act of nature’ (Griffin, 1978).

Why, after fifteen years of respect in the profession of teaching, did I seem to disappear so completely as a mother unless I returned to the workforce? Was my mothering not a ‘fulltime job’ deserving of commensurate remuneration? Seeing the act of mothering as the most profoundly important experience of my life did little to alleviate the disempowerment I was feeling both physically and psychologically. Joining support groups for single parents gave me little hope for changing my oppressive feeling of isolation and abandonment, which was expressed as a disillusioned and alienating anger.

My personal feelings were recognised as existential when I read that there once was a time when women were honoured and revered for our life-giving powers, and giving birth was seen as the ultimate act of creation, the embodiment of the Great Mysteries in the Great Mother.
Could the general appreciation of the act of mothering be changed by recovering our knowledge of this ancient perception? Do women realise what has been lost? Was there an inextricable connection between women's spirituality (in the broadest sense of 'values' and in the sense of a female metaphor for the divine), and our sense of ourselves as creative and powerful? If we could re-form a sense of ourselves as creative could we reclaim our power? And what is our experience of power as it relates to our lives as women and mothers? How are we at the effect of it and how do we exert it? It occurred to me that not many women seemed to be as angry, and perhaps did not feel as powerless as I did.

Though the research outcomes do not directly address these questions, they are questions which form the background to conceiving my proposal to research the nexus between women's spirituality, creativity and sense of personal power. I started to formulate the many variations on the theme into a desire: to empower and be empowered as woman and mother through the realisation of self as ultimate creator and expression of the numinous.

My positioning was moving into the feminist arena with strong connections to both the spiritual and eco feminist philosophies broadly expressing a system of ethics which sees all in nature as interconnected, interdependent, inclusive and non-hierarchical (Starhawk, 1989; Diamond and Orenstein (eds), 1990; Spretnak, 1993; Eisler, 1987, 1996; King, 1993). Capra has recognised a 'natural kinship' between spiritual and eco feminisms in their tendency to see female experiential knowledge as major source for an ecological vision of reality (Capra, 1996:9). Another level seemed to be entering my research proposal: to possibly effect change through the research process, rather than observe its possibility. This would bring the project alive for me.
In recognising this desire as arising in a rejection of the patriarchal system and values, I needed to find a research approach which fitted into my experiences and perceptions for the needs of mothering. Such a research practice should not employ conventional objective and reductionist methods, nor would the results of my proposal be quantifiable. I did not want to reassert the dominant paradigm, either in the process or in the naming. I needed to find a valid way of gaining knowledge and insight, of promoting change and accommodating my voice and my perspective, within the broad and varied culture of women.

I do not claim to speak for all women, having worked with only a small section of my local community, who like myself are from a Celtic European background and have lived in Australia for several generations. I have nevertheless arrived at the premise that being woman gives me insight and rights, just as does belonging to aboriginal people (over people of other ethnic groups) in terms of researching aboriginal culture, although tribal and sexual boundaries are acknowledged.

Presenting the Research in Three Parts
Reinharz (1992:241) has called feminist research a perspective, not a method, and uses the metaphor of an 'ecology' to open the doors further for viewing the research process as 'an ecological system of people, institutions and ideas, connected to each other in complex ways'. It is in the recognition and celebration of this complex diversity that I am presenting my thesis in three different aspects: as a series of artquilts, as a limited edition book about the quilts and my process in making them, and as the research text.
The three aspects of this research project are witness to a way of ‘growing’ a way by which truth/reality is consciously apprehended through ‘opening up to the intuitive, but also using your rational faculties’ (Lonegrin, 1991:44). It engages the attributes of both left and right hemispheres of the brain, allowing an openess to experiences in which ‘comprehension and compassion mingle; in which intellect, emotion, and spirit are integrated; in which intuition, spontaneity, and self-exploration are seen as components of unified experience; in which discovery and creation are reflections of creative research into human ventures, human processes, and human experiences’ (Moustakis in Reason and Rowan (eds), 1981:216).

The way the research process evolved organically as an extension of my lived experiences and emotions was through the making of a series of artquilts which celebrate the seasonal festivals of the old European and Celtic spiritual traditions. It is a tradition which for millennia has expressed the unity of self with the great forces of nature. The quilts became an integral part of my research as expression of an emerging spiritual/eco feminist philosophy, as well as a hands-on means to explore women’s creativity. It is also this reviving tradition which I sought to embody ritually so that I could integrate my growing philosophy more fully into my own life. Through making the quilts I was able to research the relationship between the spiritual and creative processes, and began to consider myself (and others) as making ‘religious’ art to express the Mystery, in much the same spirit of Palaeolithic cave painters.

The production and publication of a limited edition handcrafted book (Solomon, 1997) to elucidate my findings - historical, mythological, and personal - in the process of making the quilts is the second form of presentation arising from my research. Like the quilts, its production was
part of the research process as well as being outcome, since it was through the writing that I formed theoretical perceptions and consolidated my readings. The quilts and the book are authentic expressions of my intention to empower and be empowered through experiencing rather than by abstract theorising.

The third part of the research is the compilation of the research text, as summary of intention, methods and insights from engaging in the project. In organising the material required for this text, I have used the process for creating a quilt as analogy to form the four chapters of the research text (called ‘blocks’). Creating a quilt is also metaphor for the entire process I have engaged in to do the research in its various parts.

An intrinsic expression to the process, both of making the quilts and celebrating the festivals of the old Celtic calendar ritually, has been observation of the seasonal cycles, which I see as another layer of metaphor for the research project overall. Recognition of the movement between consciousness of light and dark and awareness of the dance of creation, disintegration, and re-creation likewise has relevance to both the formation of the research text and to the overall project. I have noticed its expression in the internal processes, my inner cycles, during the writing of this document, during the making of the quilts, and in the practice of ritual.

**Activating the Research**

Fabrics are looked at by the patchwork quilter for their tonal values, the lights and the darks, and they are chosen for their appropriacy to the theme of the quilt being made. For my ‘research quilt’, I chose ‘fabrics’ which represented and expressed the themes of women’s spirituality, creativity, and personal power, in their different variations. Similarly, the process or methods chosen by which to engage in the research could
be considered as an assortment of fabrics chosen for their applicability to the theme and arising from my lived experience as woman, mother and quilt artist.

Being more interested in making creative artquilts, I have not set about to develop a 'how to' approach to either research or quilt making. Just as the making of quilts fits into the patterns of my daily schedule, (there is often a mixture of fabric pieces and food on the kitchen bench at any one time), the design of the research process became apparent as I went along as a cyclical process. It involved collaborating with other women, and interpreting and reflecting on my own experience in relation to others from my perspective of spiritual and eco feminism. I realised that it would continue as a cyclic embodiment of my personal experiences in interaction and reflection, in storying and re-storying, which would precipitate in the final documentation of the research text.

The various research methods I have chosen to use include quilt making, ritual observation, personal interview and my own personal journal writing. In taking these approaches I am placing emphasis on individuality in connectedness and diversity in communion, as values which underpin my starting point. In this way, I believe that I am drawing from and being responsive and in integrity to knowledge past, and contributing to the existing discipline of feminist research. In the process I have experienced a personal integrity, and the approaches I have taken are integral to the web of life.

I sometimes refer to the process of cutting and piecing strips of different fabrics as 'making my own fabric' for the creation of an artquilt. The process is necessarily creative and personal because it is purposeful. Accordingly I have created my own fabrics from my personal life experience in collaboration with the women who participated in my
research. Together we have created the fabric which forms my ‘research quilt’: some we dyed, either to cover up another colour or to introduce a desired effect; we cut up old clothes no longer worn; bought pieces cheaply at Op shops and expensively at patchwork shops, hunted in our scrap bags and rummaged through hoarded piles to find the right piece; and gave ‘precious’ pieces to each other as gifts.

These are some of the fabrics from our life experiences which became taped interviews, personal reflections in my journal, memories unfolding in the safe space of a ritual circle, personal and shared revelations arising as intuitive ‘gnowings’. Each ‘fabric’ has been valued for its intrinsic worth. They have been discarded (it is impossible to put it all in a quilt) and the remainder sewn together to form a ‘research quilt’ which strives to make meaning for myself and possibly other women in the two media which continue to delimit women’s position: in the world of academia, where women’s ways of gaining knowledge are considered less valuable (Reinharz, 1992:247), and access to the system is restricted by the requirements of mothering; and in the arts, where practice in textile media is still marginalised.

Writing the Research Text

I have cut from these collected and assorted fabrics and pieced them together to form the four blocks and the border which form the structure of this document, the research text. The four blocks correspond to the motivation and inspiration, the choices for method and design, the whole pieced cloth, and reviewing the finished quilt in its own light. The influence of the three original ‘fabrics’ spirituality, creativity and empowerment - can be felt in each of the blocks, thereby it is hoped, forming a unified whole from the fragments, which is what happens visually in creating a successful design in fabric. The border is true to name and signifies not only a containment by summarising and reviewing the work, but also a horizon, a place to cross over.
Piecing the Blocks for the Research Text

On the wheel of the year the festival of Lughnasad, or Lammas, heralds the coming of the season of autumn. As leaves fall from trees we become aware of the need for transformation at almost the same time as the fruits of last year’s planting are being gathered and enjoyed. Whilst the fruits are to be enjoyed, to nurture and sustain, they must also leave seed for the next cycle if there is to be another harvest. And transformational dreaming is made manifest in the baking of the loaf of bread, when the grain mysteriously becomes not only food but as seed is a promise for the future.

As a quilt artist, hardly a day goes past without my dreaming up an idea which needs to be transformed into fabric in order to be explored. It can be sparked by the current season of my inner landscapes, by feeling the energy in the dark places, at the roots beneath the ground or in the light, airy space where the sap rises into the branches. It can be sparked as much from the inspiration from nature's cycles as from my own life circumstances. Over the years I have come to realise that it is my imagination which sparks the transformation, urged on by the need to realise the potential of the dream.

In Block I the need for transformation is recognised, both personal and social, in both the private and in a public domain, as I ponder the circumstance of my life as a woman alerted by motherhood. I see the need to respond in a way that is outside, and yet immediately part of my experience, to respond creatively and imaginatively, to find an innovative and personal approach which might meet both the public and personal needs of my research question.
Samhain is the old Celtic name for the festival which remembers the powerful energies of the dark season of the year. Hallowe’en, feast of All Saints, is the Christian festival superimposed on this ancient earth-honouring tradition, which saw the dark as part of a larger cyclic pattern of death and decay, to be followed by a seemingly dormant period underground or in the womb - in the dark - from which arose new life. Winter holds the mystery of the seed underground, as yet unmanifest, of life in the womb, which is nurtured by the dark warmth. At mid-winter the sun returns as glimmer in the heart of darkness which ‘gnows’ an ending and a new start.

The cycle of creativity begins in the dark, with an idea germinating, as I collect fabrics which might suit the spark of an idea. At first they are all bundled together, pulled out of organised space onto the design table (or lie around on the lounge room floor as life goes on about them), picked out and over for their potential by colour, pattern, quality. Sometimes they are cut to measurement and sorted into piles waiting to be sewn together into the basic units which form a block. They are often moved around, placed beside each other, then re-sorted. This happens many times before final choice of fabric to be used is made.

In Block 2 the gestation period symbolises the constant and serious reflection about the theme which seems to permeate my life, and involves ‘questioning the very basis of socialisation and perception’ (Reinhardz, 1992:241). The final design is not at hand, and as I engage with the multiple ways of how (lack of) knowledge is constituted for women, I start to see social change as an imperative goal of research and of my research in particular. I feel the need to find a way to embody, to ‘live’ the central focus of my research question, and find that in my life the ‘fabrics’ which suit the making of a ‘research quilt’ to reflect these concerns are becoming more evident. Still undecided about when and
how to use them, I select those ‘fabrics’ which suit the theme from the lounge room floor and put them in matching piles on the design table.

In the season of Imbolc, the light gradually returning indicates that spring is not far away, bringing with it the energy of life renewed and revitalised by its sojourn in the dark. We are on our way out of the nurturing dark to find that, through the interaction between the dark soil and the warm sun, the seed is sprouting. Vulnerable as it shows the tip of new growth above the ground, it pushes upward with the energy of desire in desire to know its full potential. Flowers form and open to the urge to participate in the dance. After sharing their beauty, the flowers die back and transform into the potential for fruit and seed which will ripen and germinate in the next cycle.

After letting the fabrics to be used in the ‘research quilt’ emerge, I start forming the blocks or panels from which a design develops which will show up the concept most effectively, so that what needs to come forth can be recognised. It is the time to take a step back from the ideas and work and let it talk for itself, tell its story, invite an interaction in order to bring clarity and definition, coherence and unity. It is a time for being able to recognise the potential in the many disparate parts, to value their diversity and uniqueness, whilst making a creation out of their connection. There are moments of decision about what to include, how to include it most effectively and what to leave out.

This process corresponds to Block 3 of the research text, where the theme of the research, the relationship between our spirituality, creativity and empowerment, has come full term. Feeding on our passions and hopes, our courage, and pieced together from the fragments of our lives, the growing awareness of the women who are helping to form the ‘research quilt’ is birthed, made manifest. It offers insights into the deep
connecting patterns formed from the fragments of each others' lives. The pattern from which we create our own lives shows up, as we begin to see the world without filters, through the eyes of our own experience. There is recognition of the communion we can achieve in our diversity as we midwife each other into growing consciousness of power felt in spiritualising and creating our lives.

With the lighting of the Beltane fires on the night of October 31 and the excitement of daring to leap across the flames, comes a sense of determination in the risk, a sureness about the potential of the spring. There is also a sense of 'growing', that as the Summer Solstice approaches, the shoots and blossoms will bud and ripen into fruit and grain to be enjoyed and indulged in during the season of harvests, and will in turn seed the next planting.

When the final pattern or design is decided upon, and the blocks or panels of pieced fabric are joined to form the top of a quilt, the finished design is revealed, perhaps an undreamed of design. To complete the quilt, the final task is to stitch the three layers of backing, batting and top together, and finally to bind it around the edges so that it can be used for warmth or decoration and stored to last (the generally applied definition of what constitutes a quilt being 'three layers of fabric held together by stitching').

**Block 4** of the 'research quilt' forms a block in that it is cut from the same fabrics as the other three blocks to form the finished design for a research text. It also does the stitching, and contributes to the overall design of the research quilt by enhancing the theme and elaborating, often by adding embroidery and embellishment into the design and putting some final touches. It draws the elements of design and intention together. Using the quilt-making analogy from another perspective, Block 1 can be seen as
the backing (background); Block 2 as the batting (substance); Block 3 as the top (pattern/design); and Block 4 as the process by which the three layers are stitched together to show the cohesiveness of all the elements of design. In 3 and 4 there is recognition of the interaction between gender and power in both the private and the public domain, and of the invisible reality which acknowledges the ineffectiveness of the subject/object dichotomy.

The Border
To finish a quilt a border of fabric is stitched around the perimeter to both contain and set off the design. It forms a frame, a context, and completes the circle of creation for this creative project. It is both an ending and a beginning. For the research quilt, the border corresponds to the Introduction and References Cited, and to the summary reflections presented by way of response from other women to the quilts and the book (Solomon, 1997).

The time where seasons and festivals seem to overlap provide a pause, the feeling of being in hiatus between the worlds where, for example, the abundance and fullness of summer's harvest at Lammas seems to be giving way to the need for the growing darkness. In those times of seeming dormancy, a composting takes place to form a nurturing layer of soil for the new seeds. And as we gaze at the completed projects of the light, we become aware of our own appraisals and those of others gleaming in the dark. New ideas start to form for the next quilt or creative project, different questions form for the next adventure into self-growing, and new inspiration is felt and renewed energy arises.

Between the Worlds
It becomes apparent, mostly when looking at traditional or conventional quilts, that the overall design is built up from a variety of individual
designs, which is why they are such an apt metaphor for the systems we develop as humans, and the fragmented lives we often lead as women. When one looks at a conventional, as distinct from a contemporary style quilt, it is often the case that the basic units from which the overall design takes shape may be formed from two or more different 'blocks' at least from two similar blocks placed in formation or juxtaposition. Yet when they are pieced together they form an altogether different design, what may be described as the principle design. The complementary positioning of two basic blocks was the way the casement window for Brigid’s Banner was formed to create what is known as a California Twist (Solomon, 1997:33).

Often added layers of interpretation are available via the interaction of the individual blocks not only with each other, but also with the fabric from which they are made, creating the possibility to regard the quilt form as a multivalent expression. It is this way that I hope the three layers of the research process, including the research text will be viewed: various themes becoming evident at different stages, some more obvious, some quite subtle, others interacted with on a personal level.

These variant patterns are able to be interpreted by the interplay of light and dark fabrics, perhaps including the somewhat confusing and nevertheless defining influence of 'medium' shades, which not only achieves the equalising of the oppositional factors of light and dark, but throws them off against each other as interdependent in the creation of the design. All variations of tonalities contribute to the design.

As another layer, or from another dimensional perspective, I have seen my research process as an experience in and expression of women’s ways of gaining knowledge, and by corollary, of the need to recognise and validate women’s ways of expressing knowledge gained. It is my hope.
that as response to the global ecological stalemate which affects all of us both bodily and at the deepest soul level, it offers a useful and expansive perspective towards developing a sense of personal power which derives from a creative and spiritual relationship to each other and the planet.

The use of the textile arts as signifier of sexual difference in patriarchal ideology has been historically documented by Rozsika Parker (1996). She points out that in the Victorian era, the notion of femininity required a conformity of expression in the textile arts, which in turn ‘constructed its practitioners in its own image’ (1996:215). Parker provides hope that the circle will remain open because,

‘limited to practising art with needle and thread,
women have nevertheless sewn a subversive stitch -
managed to make meaning of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement’ (ibid).

I am particularly grateful to have found acknowledgment for the making of the artquilts as part of my research project by the Faculty of Social Inquiry. It is a step towards bringing in from the margins a form by which many women over many centuries have been expressing and experiencing social relationships and themselves. It is with the countless and diverse stories women have told through their textile crafts in mind that I wrote the book for publication, and have continued the patchwork quilting by analogy to form the framework of the research text.

Another writer on the history of women’s twenty thousand years’ involvement in the fibre arts, Wayland Barber (1994), has had to construct her theory through ‘finding the invisible’, since much of women’s history has been connected with ‘evanescent occupation’ (ibid:286). This circumstance has kept women’s story and circumstances ‘between the worlds’. By using available sources creatively, myth and the
tools of archaeological research, she considers women to have been a powerful economic force in the ancient and early modern worlds, with their own industry: fabric. Goddesses were honoured for their creation of the fibre arts, and for the trading links these skills promoted, and changes in styles of cloth can indicate radical changes in economic and social structure. Cloth was seen as a spiritual and magical force, centred round ‘the women’s cultural as well as economic and medical concerns’ (ibid:116). The realisation that ‘cloth for thousands of years was the notebook that recorded the woes and joys, hopes, visions, and aspirations of women’ (ibid:256) has encouraged me on my quest for self expression through cloth.
BLOCK 1: SENSING THE GNOWING...urge(n.cy)...inspiring and creating

We cannot own our power without owning our anger.

For anger is energy - the deep energy of the life force that arises in response to threat. It gives us the strength to meet danger.


The naming and listing of injustice eventually leads to our seeing it as a complex web of systemic oppression: all social institutions, beliefs and relationships each in particular ways, discriminate against women. Worse, the system turns us against ourselves: all women, each in our own particular ways, accept most of such discrimination as normal. We are therefore doubly trapped.

Jill Matthews (1984:9)

......this drive to self-knowledge, for women is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of the male-dominated society.

Adrienne Rich (quoted by Callaway, in Reason and Rowan (1981:457)

The conventional mind does not know how to see expressions of the cthonic and irrational soul as natural. 'Health' is also considered to be a faithful representation of a 'reality' that also happens to fit the perceptual bias of the viewer.

Shaun McNiff (1992:11)
Finding the Path

For many years now, perhaps nine or ten, I have carried around in my wallet a quote from Dale Spender. I'm not sure where she said it; my sister passed it on to me, and it was passed on to her by a woman friend. Spender advised that 'Women should stop feeling guilty and learn to express their justifiable anger". (She may have said 'our' rather than 'their'.) Undertaking this research thesis is part of my learning process - in both learning how to express what needs to be expressed so that it will be heard, as well as simply recognising the need and giving it expression. Spender's advice has kept me going, trying to cut both ways as her admonition suggests.

The initial signposts which sent me down the path towards researching for a Masters degree in Social Ecology arose in desire for my own healing, in both the physical and emotional/psychological domains. At the age of forty, I had given birth to my son in the expectation of a stable and secure relationship with his father. Both my expectations and sense of security were shattered, resulting in (what I now see to be healthy) anger, which was related back to me as a sense of unworthiness. This interpretation set me on a circuitous journey which has brought me full circle to a place where I can recognise my anger as not only ‘justifiable’ in Spender’s terms, but also a powerful force for change.

The physical manifestation (was it caused by the anger or the unworthiness I asked) was the arrival of an inflamed and ruddy skin condition on my face which could only be treated conventionally by the use of antibiotics. Such drugs do not help mental states and they are known to contaminate breastmilk. Although other types of medical substances undoubtedly do abate mental conditions, (my situation was not deemed ‘serious’ enough to undertake medication, being more a social embarrassment) they would also affect the milk supply.
Being committed to continue breast-feeding as my son's birthright, the only option was to investigate the so-called alternative approaches to healing. I worked with many alternatives, such as Vedic medicine and meditation, Yoga, aroma and colour therapy. I sought answers in myself through conversational counselling and from the ether through psychic readings. The ruddy and inflamed complexion persisted, with seemingly only myself to blame. It gave me little encouragement, and certainly offered no solution to be told that therapist Louise Hay considers inflamed facial skin to indicate a low self-esteem.

Although seemingly dormant, or at least under control, I knew that the anger ran in underground psychological rivers, rarely allowed to rise to the surface, least the socialised equilibrium of self and others be disturbed. Wise in hindsight, friends told me that I should have known that my son's father would walk out; and that I was too old to be having children anyway. Other 'new age' gurus were giving out the more esoteric message that we all make choices in life, for which we need to be responsible. I was trying on all of these communications, giving myself a hard time, and still the untapped anger simmered quietly, fed by a sense of the injustice of the situation.

Questions about the nature and definition of pathological conditions, as well as of women's mental health, arose in response to the experiencing of mothering. Unexpectedly I was experiencing a powerlessness in different facets of life which seemed directly related to the state of being a mother, experienced as subtle forms of discrimination. I started to wonder whether I was being required to adopt an inferior position, simply by virtue of my status as woman, mother and mother-without-partner.
Larger questions loomed: did my feelings of powerlessness and low self-esteem result solely from the way I viewed myself, or did they also stem unconsciously from the way the society in which I have been raised views motherhood particularly and women generally. Do these two sides of the same coin get to see each other’s picture? And if so, how can this process effect both personal change and change in the outer worldview, if at all? How is power exercised appropriately in one’s choices in life when there is little evidence of personal worth or worthiness to start with?

**Empowerment and Personal Development Programs**

In the process of asking the questions, I was both seeking and creating a map for a journey into the territory of my own psychological terrain, with both a transpersonal and a political intent. Many of the workshops I had attended stressed the capacity for personal change, of working with my own story for greater personal integrity and power by altering some of the key story-lines so that my life’s journey could be empowered.

Nevertheless, it was becoming evident that very few of these ‘self-help’ programs discussed valid ways to re-interpret the storyline, particularly for women and mothers. Their starting point was the dominant and institutionalised paradigm, which is both patriarchal and has a materialistic, pragmatic focus. And they both stay well within the boundaries of a paradigm which psychotherapist, Anne Wilson Schaeff (1981, 1992, 1992) calls the White Male Society, a system which bestows legitimacy for perceptions of personal worth and interpretations of personal story according to its own story, thereby developing an addictive and self-perpetuating system.

Apparently the only way out of this closed circuit was to use the ‘pull yourself up by the bootlaces’ trick, by definition itself an impossibility. Do
all women feel as stuck as I did? Why do we let it happen to us? Was there another paradigm for both pathology and mothering which I did not know about, or could create for myself, so as to be empowered in my own healing and life experiences?

Personal Power as Woman and Mother
My adventure into the journey of self-healing - or what I now prefer to call ‘wholing’ after such writers on therapy as Wilson Schaeff (ibid) and Hillman (1996) - started via works on paper. James Hillman says that ‘(w)e are victims primarily of theories before they are put into practice’ (1996:6). It was going to be several years before I read about Hillman’s “acorn theory”, an idea based in the uniqueness which is in each person and which asks to be lived, but which cannot be lived ‘until the theoretical paradigms that give rise to that (victim) mentality have been seen through and set aside’ (ibid).

Awakening to the possibilities of art as therapy, I attended and organised several art therapy workshops, with the result that on one occasion the trained art therapist told me that I had given away my personal power at the age of eighteen. She was the authority and had interpreted many visual expressions of the unconscious. With the earlier questions arising from my own personal experiencing of mothering still dangling, I accepted her diagnosis that I had given away my power. I continued to struggle to take responsibility for her diagnosis so that I might find a way (devise a “how to”) in order to repossess my power, as though it were a commodity, and decided to study Art Therapy for a Masters Degree.

My personal condition as woman and mother in a single-parent household, undertaking a full-time course of study at University, brought with it experiences and realisations of the gender divide previously unexperienced. It augmented a sense of what Wilson Schaeffe (1992) and
Spender (1990) have referred to generally as an assigned inferiority, which seemed to be beyond my power to simply pass off as personal story which could be changed just by rewriting the script, (although I recognise now that this is what I am doing through ritual and art, in the context of having abandoned the quest for legitimacy from within and approval by the dominant paradigm).

At this time I was drawing my dawning realisations in the images of a yawning chasm in the earth, always in the desert. There was no swinging bridge in the picture, no pontoon, no bungie jump even. There seemed to be no other way across than to clamber down the steep and dangerous rock face to find the deep water - without ropes. Could it be that these series of images show the unconscious realisation that something was missing, something to which I was seeking access? It could be that through the course of our culture’s history something was lost as our search for healthful/wholing living and expressions of the soul through art moved further away from each other. Shaun McNiff asserts this, describing it as ‘....the loss of their aboriginal relationship and reciprocal caring for the soul’ (ibid:10).

The Soul’s Journey into Women’s Spirituality
Coincidental with this growing fascination for story about the inner realms revealed through art was in introduction to the feminine metaphor of deity, which I will continue to name by the broad title of women’s spirituality, the emphasis being on an evolving reclamation of female persona(e) as central metaphor to spiritual expression, (rather than taking a broad cross-section of women within existing religious denominations).

This introduction took place as a series of experiential workshops which included ritual expression of the sacred, and which was outside anything
I had experienced within the spiritual tradition in which I had been raised (Roman Catholicism). Such practice of ritual is not an attempt to re-instate or ‘reform’ (that is return to a previous practice, so as to find ‘authenticity’) but a creative, intuitive and spontaneous response to the present needs of the body/soul.

I feel sure it had occurred to me that I was on a journey into my own psyche, but I had not yet made the connection between psyche (the Greek word for soul which forms the basis of our word psychology) and spirituality. With the realisation of an alternative paradigm by which to view my spirituality as woman and mother came the gradual realisation that I could work within that same paradigm to consider my mental and physical health and well-being. Perhaps I did not need to strain unsuccessfully at my own bootlaces in order to regain my sense of power and integrity. Repeating this assigned role only served to reinforce my incapacity, my victim status, corroborating my sense of unworthiness.

I read about the three hundred year period in Europe when the church and civil authorities conspired to destroy the healing and spiritual independence of women (Daly, 1973; Starhawk, 1982; Barstow, 1994). My reflection on this history is developed in Solomon (1997: Chapter 1) and expressed visually in the quilt for Samhain. I continued to wonder why the positive attributes I was experiencing in the process of mothering - unconditional love, sharing and connectedness and what I later recognised as a power drawn from an honouring of the life-giving energies, seemed to hold little value in the ‘real’ and practical world. I was feeling that some approaches to psychotherapy address these ways of being in the context of a ‘lack of boundary formation’, and are seen as such to be detrimental to emotional well-being.
Within the White Male System (or from Freud’s perspective, according to the male normative ‘law of the father’), the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung both evolved out of the basic mistake of confusing social phenomena with “nature” both biologically and normatively (Daly, 1973; Radford Ruether, 1975). Their theories relating to psychological health through dependency on the father, or what has come to be known more universally in psychotherapy as the process of ‘individuation’, deny the ‘original dependency on the matrix of nature and on mother’ thereby depriving mother of power and child of knowledge of ‘the mother as both one’s personal origin and the symbol of the primal matrix’ (Ruether, 1975:148). The values I have referred to are unsung in all but the highly idealised notion of romantic love - usually of male for female rather than parent - particularly mother - for child. Is there some connection between the invisibility and pathologising of motherhood and loss of agency in spiritual matters for women?

Art Therapy and Theory

For one semester I sought the path to self-knowledge through psychological theory via a Masters in Art Therapy by course work. My son was then four and was left in daycare while I struggled to be on time for class, get assignments completed, and not be distracted by thoughts for his welfare (at which I failed miserably). I read about the theories of great men and women on the causes of psychological illnesses. It was Masson’s (1992) critique of Freud’s theory which confirmed my intuition that the foundations of modern psychotherapy were not only based in the myths of dualism and reductionism, but interpret women’s experience within the borders of the White Male System.

Two strong colours were beginning to show up in the overall fabric of western society: that much theory being taught on the subject of therapy was firmly couched within the dominant male, materialistic and
objective paradigm (albeit it sometimes covered by the cloak of the 'alternative' or 'new age'); and that the being of woman and the act of mothering were virtually invisible in their own right, except as a adjunct to, that is as part of, the dominant paradigm.

I needed to find a way to learn to trust my interpretations of my experience as woman and mother, to re-write the story, re-frame my perceptions of personal and political power, spirituality, and self-worth. The social system was reflecting back to me a widening gap between an understanding of the connections between the personal and the political, and between soul/spirit and matter. The reflection was not empowering.

From the experiences described above came the urge(ncy) to close the gap, or perhaps to bridge it, at least to venture into it to dig for fossils. I decided that for my Master's thesis by research I would consider the relationship between women's spirituality, creativity and personal power. A new vision of this relationship for women and by women may offer the possibility for personal and planetary healing by finding new ways of recognising and experiencing empowerment.
BLOCK 2: SOURCING THE GNOWING...germinating seeds...gestating
and embodying

Write yourself, your body must be heard..... I will
give you your body and you’ll give me mine

......into every act of knowing there enters a
passionate contribution of the person knowing
what is known, and ... this coefficient is no mere
imperfection but a vital component of his (sic)
knowledge.
Moustakis quoting Polanyi (in Reason and Rowan,
1981:211).

I’m there where
its talking
Where that speaks I
am not in that talking place
    Where
that says
my being is
    Where
my being there
is speaking
I am
    And so
laughing
in a stone ear.

Le Guin (1989:155)
The poem cited above is based on six words from "The Laugh of Medusa" by Helene Cixous: *je suis la ou ca parle*. It encapsulates the double bind of being born woman. I am writing this research document from the premise of woman and mother, spiritual feminist, and quilt artist. As with my approach to the ways I have conducted my research, made the quilts, and written the book (Solomon, 1997), so do I approach the writing of the research text. (However it is not my intention to turn ears to stone.)

To use the analogies of Ursula Le Guin (1989), this research text is spoken - that is written - neither wholly in my 'native tongue', the tongue which speaks for itself in relatedness through poetry and art, offering a sense of communion and is the tongue of quilts. Nor is it entirely my 'mother tongue', which speaks as story and experience, again eliciting shared experience. This is the voice of my journal and the book. Le Guin says that public discourse call to the third form of expression, which she calls the 'father tongue', which does not speak itself because it is 'the language of power - of social power', a power which cannot admit the capacity for 'an authority without supremacy - a non-dominating authority' (ibid: 148). It is also the language of thought, which wants no answers, that is communion, because it seeks objectivity. It is not my language, nor do I aspire to it. It is also not representative of the way in which I sourced and integrated wisdom during the process of research.

Two aspects of my research process express the voice of difference, of woman and mother: the quilts, and the book. These aspects came about as a deliberate decision to produce the work of this thesis so that it would be accessible to those who are both audience and participators in the process of effecting change for ourselves as women. For this reason, I continue to struggle with the need to write in Le Guin's third category, the 'father tongue', resulting it would seem in the conventional research
document written in academic genre, which is not an authentic expression for my thesis or myself.

Having had the experience of knowing the quilts to be the embodied imagery of my intellectual, emotional and spiritual processes - a process which I believe expresses the term *jouissance* of French feminist writer, Julia Kristeva - it is my intention to try to continue the embodying process as I write this document. French feminism claims that ‘a new woman’s writing of discourse is necessary to retrieve the repression of the feminine unconscious in western discourse and models of subjectivity’ (Dallery in Jagger and Bordo, 1989:53). And if a woman’s body is always mediated by language, the language of social power, then it is all the more urgent to find a way to write authentically and without compromise. It is my hope that through the presentation of my research I am engaging in the autoerotic practice of difference, effecting a re-storying which poses a direct challenge to the hegemony of patriarchy embedded in language and symbol.

Included in the same essay by Dallery is a glossary listing of the term *jouissance* as ‘a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concerns about end or close; it is sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual at the same time’. It is different from the convention of male desire in that it does not posit a dualism or an end result. ‘Feminine *jouissance* takes place on the linguistic level of the semiotic, between physiology and speech, nature and culture, the presymbolic, before the separation of self, and other’ (ibid: 56). Kristeva says it expresses the continuity of self and other in the way that, in giving birth, women experience ‘continuity differentiating itself’ (ibid: 56).

It is in this spirit that I ask this research text be read. It is written to celebrate women as sexual subject, with the intent of expressing
continuity differentiating itself. It aims to continue the creative process by weaving the strands of novelty and continuity for a holistic presentation of my thesis in the form of artquilts, book and research text as 'autonomous expressions of radical otherness'. In Dallery's (ibid:63) words, the three aspects of this project are a 'validation of feminine nonoppositional otherness'.

In making this assertion, I am not coming from the position of a separatist politics. Nevertheless, I am required to think linearly about a process which was and continues to be cyclical. Nor am I espousing an historic essential nature of woman, based on yet another definition positing innate differences between men and women in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense of hierarchical dualisms and reductionist oppositions, upon which the body of western wisdoms rests, and by means of which knowledge is stored and considered to be gained (Wilshire in Jagger and Bordo (eds), 1989:91-114).

The fabric of parler femme, or ecriture feminine is perhaps one name for the process I have been coming to terms with organically and intuitively throughout the course of the research (and my life). In 'writing (the) body', French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray have languaged (and therefore symbolised) that a cultural process is required in order for women to deal with political issues at more than an ideological level, where we remain largely powerless except insofar as we remain 'other' thereby fulfilling the role of complementarity (Keller, 1986).

Irigaray holds that our unconscious 'contains the historically repressed features of the significant other - the woman, whose repression occurred first in society and then in the psyche' (Gottner-Abendroth, 1982:27). The solution to uncovering the primal knowledge in the unconscious, a women's language, is through the body, side-stepping the language of
power and reaching into the source of creation - desire, arising primarily in a longing for the Self, expressed in the language of the senses through the body (ibid:27-28).

In her essay entitled "Women’s perspectives: research as revision", in which she outlines several phases of women’s research, Helen Callaway (in Reason and Rowan (eds), 1981:470) says that ‘(T)he principle of the priority of female experience pointed to is corollary: ourselves as our own sources. .....We examined ourselves, our persons, not as isolated beings, but as social creations related to others within a world of socially constituted meanings and powers’.

The theory of ecriture feminine is more than theory, which implies illusion, a virtual reality. Likewise my living experience is not theory, but rather a continual process of being in a context, which involves reflection, decisions, and ability to respond authentically. It requires constant acts of integrity, integrity to the core of my thesis: that a remembering and re-valuing, a re-visioning of the Mystery of creation through mothering (gestation and nurturance), ritual (the daily acts which honour the mystery of my being woman and mother), and creativity (an ever-present awareness of my role in the unfolding universe, made manifest in my spiritual expressions and in the quilts) is at the heart of healing and growth for both myself and the planet.

Because it is impossible to transform the creative processes I have experienced in the making of quilts, participating in ritual, and in conversational interchange, my next best move is to think about the writing of this text as though I were in fact making a quilt or having a conversation, using words as fabric to express the pieced blocks and form an image of my worldview.

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I am cutting from the cloth of a growing feminist research tradition (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986; Jaggar and Bordo (eds), 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Reason, 1994; Olesen, 1994) to form my own ‘research quilt’, thereby revisioning knowledge and the processes by which knowledge is accessed and assessed. By remaining in integrity not only to the premise of my theory, but to continuing the process of engaging with the nature of theorising, as both subject and observer, I am gaining access on a presymbolic level to what in western culture is unconsciously held story, therefore opening up space both physically and emotionally for the possibility of change. In spiritual terms I call this process ‘mystical’ - or engaging the Mystery.

To engage in the Mystery, whether through art, ritual, story-telling or therapy, is another means by which to ‘write the body’, a means by which a worldview can alter to invest inner and outer stories with different meanings which empower. It induces another mode of perception ‘that sees patterns and relationships .......... revealing the play of woven branches and the dance of shadows, sensing pathways as spaces in the whole’ (Starhawk, 1989:32). It requires a new way of looking out from an inner glowing, and invites a new way of be-ing with the inner glowing. The format of the research and the means for its presentation is therefore authenticated by my process of gaining and providing opportunity for an ongoing empowerment for both myself and the other women involved.

Researching Lived Experience
I needed to think differently about the research process in order to accommodate my personal life, the social relationship I had with some of the women, as well as the ‘nature’ of both creativity and spirituality, both very personal concepts and practices. I needed to create the research
process almost daily, letting it grow organically because of my positioning as both researcher and researched, and because both spiritual and creative practice are alive, embodied and embedded in my daily life. I describe it as a feminist method in social research after Reinharz (1992:219): it has been a process which was ‘self-reflexive, collaborative, attuned to process, oriented to social (and personal) change, and designed for women rather than only of women.... and concerned primarily with the empowerment of women’.

Some of the women with whom I have engaged in this study were involved with creative artforms, and others were interested in women’s spirituality. The women invited to be part of the group to investigate women’s spirituality were aware of my subjective stance, as they too realised their involvement in what is generally termed ‘consciousness-raising’ which would lead to new ways of thinking and being. This aspect of the research was therefore recognised as ‘real’, with the potential to be political, therapeutic and creative. The assorted fabrics of my life and the lives of all the women with whom I created quilts and expressed my spiritual desires, our stories and listenings, were the basic stuff from which the revealing blocks have been pieced together to make the research quilt. Structurally they were framed by convenience, the movement of the moon, and the earth in relation to the sun, and driven by our passion to create and our lust for life.

Although the rationale for this approach is firmly supported by a growing feminist tradition of research, its true validity lies in the fact that I ‘real’-ise myself by the approach I have taken. It has involved a process of self-discovery, incorporating living elements of verification and corroboration, which are what Moustakis (in Reason and Rowan, 1981:209) in his work on heuristic research calls ‘a potential discovery striving to emerge into actuality’. I continue to work collaboratively with
some of the women, creating pathways for a growing body of
contemporary quilt-makers, as well as an unfolding tradition for women
who are seeking authentic spiritual expression. They are processes by
which I am gaining an autonomous identity as woman and creating
deeper understandings of and for ‘women’s ways of knowing’ (Balenky et
al, 1986).

**Thesis in Gestation**
In the early stages of the research process, a study group was formed from
invited women I met in my local community who were interested in
becoming more familiar with ‘goddess’ spirituality. Attendance was
entirely optional, necessarily fluid. Usually no more than six to eight
women attended at one time, often less. The women were of differing
ages, some single, some married or divorced, with and without children.

Meeting times were at the full moon, or on the seasonal festivals of the
traditional Celtic calendar transposed to the southern hemispheric
seasons (see diagram in Solomon, 1997:105). A ritual practice according to
the reviving western European indigenous (Wiccan) tradition soon
became an integral part of the gatherings, which was familiar to some and
a new experience to others. It was enacted spontaneously and
cooperatively, without direct leadership. Sometimes individuals elected
to provide a reading which would be discussed, and personal experiences
and story were pieced into the story of Goddess and myth. Consensus
from all present was sought before the introduction of material or topics
the group might discuss.

Most present at an evening circle brought a symbol of their present
circumstances, physical and/or emotional, which was placed onto the
‘altar’ cloth in the centre, and other symbols from the surrounds were
chosen accordingly to represent the four compass directions or elements
from which creation occurs: air, fire, water and earth. Possibly the most significant symbol was that of the ‘talking stick’, sometimes a feather, sometimes another object meaningful to the evening from the point of the festival being celebrated. It is significant in that the person who takes the talking stick is given full hearing, without comment or judgement. Whilst there was structure, it did not exclude or inhibit the spontaneously expressed needs and desires of individual group members.

In therapeutic terms, the circle is a ‘holding space’. In calling the four directions, sacred space is created, which provides protection, nurturance, and is a living space for transformation, the space of the Mysteries, embodied in the creative and destructive aspects of the Great Mother which we experience as inherent in ourselves in each other. In this sacred space, and as trust in each others’ compassion and shared stories grew, it became possible to address difficulties in our lives, the nature of which moved between financial concerns to personal and sexual relationships, to dealing with past experiences of incest, abandonment and abuse. It also was appropriate to express personal joy, excitement and talk about achievements and hopes.

Concurrently, I had joined a group of patchwork quilters in my own area in order to acquaint myself with a form of the creative arts which is largely a woman’s domain. To maintain an authenticity and integrity in my research methods as both a personal and interactive experience, it was important to belong to a group of patchwork quilters from my own locality. I became a financial member of the group, participating in weekly gatherings at each member’s home on a rotating basis, and learning the skills of patchwork quilting. None of these women were familiar with the concept of women’s/feminist spirituality. All were from conventional Christian backgrounds, although none of them were currently actively involved with a church.
It is the women from this group, as well as several other women outside the group with whom I had done some art therapy sessions, who provided me initially with individual interviews (twelve in all) about their lives as women and mothers, artists and quilters. The interviews were by invitation, taped with permission, conversational and open-ended, with the general directive of seeing the relationship between one’s spiritual perspective, the practice of making quilts/art and a sense of personal power. I also taped conversations with some of the women in the ritual group about their experience of empowerment through creativity and spirituality. Sometimes the two aspects of practising an artform and women’s spirituality overlapped in the one person. I am certainly one of them, though not the only one.

During the entire period of the research I kept a personal journal, started in 1994. I wrote in it regularly, perhaps once a week throughout the research period, to record relevant information gleaned from readings about symbols and myths, full moon gatherings and ritual. The entries express relationship to others and to myself: my emotional reactions, insights and further reflections. Entries regarding thoughts and reflections about the design of a quilt were often noted in the journal, and referred to as a resource for writing about the quilts in the book (Solomon, 1997).

The journal is my story, a listening to my own voice expressing an ‘awakening to the depths of my soul’ and a seeking to understand my ‘position in the universe’, which are as Carol Christ (1980:8) describes women’s spiritual and social quests, ‘two dimensions of a single struggle’. My journal is a ‘dialectic between stories and experience. Stories give shape to experience, experience gives rise to stories’ (ibid:5). The journal writings are ‘écriture feminine’. They provide me with the opportunity to shape my own experience of the world in an active orientation,
allowing me to articulate a deeper and more spiritual understanding of Self in relation to Other.

The period of recording the interviews and reflections extended over several years evolving its own timetable from a living dynamics. During this time, I was becoming part of the spiritual community of other women, and they integral to mine. In the same way my creative pursuits through patchwork quilting took on another very important reality in my life. In reviewing the documentation, insights, knowledge and experience were accumulating, from which further insights emerged. I looked for ways the different 'swatches' of information might butt up against each other to show up main and secondary patterns. As a 'swatch' of information came in, it was reflected upon, put together with other seemingly like or disparate 'swatches' to see what affect it might have on the overall design of the 'research quilt'.

And all the time I was part of the action. In my journal I sought ways to accommodate patterns which disturbed, and rejoiced in others. And although the process involved the lives of other women, my main source for reflection came from myself, scrying the waters of my underground river. Although these various paths I have ventured down in my search for wisdom may seem discrete, rather like individual pieces of fabric or assorted types of fabrics, they form a crazy-patch design, stitched together by 'intuitive visions, feelings, sensings that went beyond anything I could record or think about or know in a factual sense' (Moustakis in Reason and Rowan, 1981:212).

To use the patchwork analogy, the processes involving ritual and patchwork groups, the interviews, the journal, the readings, and making the quilts for the seasonal celebrations were the fabrics from which I have cut and shaped an embodied research (a 'research quilt'). It is similar to
what Guba has called the ‘constructivist’ method, characterised by ‘the interactive nature of the inquirer/inquire-into dyad’ (1990:27). Clandinn and Connelly (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:418) describe these approaches as acknowledging ‘the centrality of the researchers’ own experience: their own tellings, livings, relivings, and retellings. Therefore, one of the starting points is the researchers’ own narratives of experience. We try to gain experience of our experience through constructing narratives of that experience’.

Embodying

For these reasons, my main research methods, the process and findings are both demonstrated by and recorded in The Wheel of the Year (Solomon, 1997). These findings are corroborated and supported by the experiences and insights of the women who have collaborated with me during the time of this project, and are reported in Block 3. I have chosen to report the women’s voices directly (using pseudonyms) where I felt the comment enlivened and embodied our reflections.

The creation of a series of artquilts became the embodiment of my research method, and of the expression of ‘écriture féminine’ in its fullest sense. Before I was invited to join the patchwork group, I had started to make quilts inspired by my spiritual awakenings. Inspiration for their design came from a desire to synchronise the seasons as we experience them in Australia with the festivals of the old northern European Celtic calendar, from my own readings, and from wanting to experiment with the various new skills of patchwork quilting as a from of creative self-expression/realisation.

Underpinning the process was a burning desire for what Spretnak (1993:196) has called ‘the recovery of meaning’. Ancient and indigenous spiritual traditions embody their wisdom the fundamental relationship
to earth, symbolised and metaphorised by the “omphalos”, the umbilical connection between mother and child. This relationship is annually recognised and celebrated as the cycle of growth and change in the physical world, through gestation, sprouting, fruiting, dying and decaying, before the cycle starts again. The quilts embody this recognition in that each one was made during the season for which it stands, and they are hung sequentially in my home as the wheel turns. As each quilt moves on it will be replaced. This is a recovery of spiritual meaning for me, which had become lost and from which I had felt alienated as a woman of Anglo-European descent born in Australia.

In the book (Solomon, 1997) there is significant recognition of the elements of the cycles of the seasons as mini-cycles of the psyche/soul’s process, a process which I started to become familiar with and re-recognised as a sort of natural flow during the stages of making of each quilt from creation to completion, and the beginnings of a new inspiration.

Both these aspects have been demonstrated through the quilt for the season of Beltane in November. "Beltane Dances" was taken into private collection in June, 1998. Although wanting to keep the circle intact by replacing it with another quilt for the season of Beltane it became clear to me that not only was it not Beltane in the physical world, but the inner cycles of my psyche/soul were not in tune with the spirit of the season. Nor would it be appropriate to attempt to duplicate the original quilt. (I am grateful to the owners of “Beltane Dances”, and the “Ancient Mother: Anima Mundi” quilt, for providing the quilts to be hung for exhibition for examination purposes.)

Just as many indigenous traditions of the present day see themselves as participators in the creation of the universe in a way which is not only reflected by their cosmology stories, but enacted in the actual telling of
them, the quilts aim to re-awaken that sense of participation in creation. They embody the embodiment of the universe by being more than the conventional idea of symbol, or re-presentation for a perceived ancient way of be-ing. In this sense they are pre-symbolic, or ‘the ineffable structured into images....aspects of the symbolised reality itself’ (Spretnak, 1993:95).

Again quoting Dorothy Lee, Spretnak takes the wisdom tradition of native American peoples to speak of a symbol as ‘part of a whole, a component of a field that also contains the so-called thing, as well as the process of symbolising, and the apprehending individual’ (ibid, her emphasis). The work of the artisan is a spiritual extension of the sacred whole, a living symbolism of the larger reality. When ideas and symbols become detached from bodies to become philosophy, psychology, superstition, or advertising, we lose that essential and numinous connection with the body. And, as Pollack (1997:12) asserts, ‘the body remains our fundamental truth by bringing together the understanding of physical existence and the intuition that spirituality flows through all experience’.

**Quilting a ‘Native’ Spiritual Tradition and a Female Visual Mythic Tradition**

It is possible to locate a ‘native’ tradition, and its corollary, what Kremer (1996) calls an ‘indigenous consciousness process’, within western culture. It can be seen as both ancient and unfolding (Matthews and Matthews, 1986). The process of embodying this tradition for me could be compared to walking a labyrinth, (as distinct from a maze), and is what the Matthews have described as ‘esoteric’ and exoteric’. It is a journey to make connection with Self and with Kosmos in the same process. The journey is one-way, yet two-fold. One walks alone into the inner sanctum of Self, the sacred source of creativity, faces the wonderful
“tehom”, (the swirling soup of the Void, the Black Matter, the Black Madonna), and returns by the same path to the periphery, the external world of the tribe, of symbol and story, of seasons, and sun and moon and stars. In this space we are literally ‘between the worlds’ in an ongoing ritual of creation. To walk the labyrinth is to take the track of initiation into the mystery of Self-in-relation-to-Kosmos, by reconnecting to the omphalos, revisiting the uterine cave for rebirth. The process is a continual flow of birth, life, death, decay, rebirth on the esoteric and exoteric path, the internal and external forever in interaction to create and form, destroy and re-create.

Rachel Pollack (1997:40) refers to this process as the invisible (inward, intuitive) and visible (outward, celebratory) journey. She says that ‘works of imagination make visible the invisible body’; and that ‘the junction of the visible and invisible opens the way for art’. It is this process of embodying, spiralling between the worlds, via the gateway of the labyrinth, (interestingly the word is etymologically connected to the vulva, also the ‘two lips’ analogy of Irigaray), to mediate culture by symbolising in story and image the juncture between the visible and the invisible.

It is this point of juncture that I have sought to experience, embody, and elicit in the creation of the series of quilts for The Wheel of the Year, and in the research process itself, as participant in the re-formation of creation cosmologies for our time. The quilts were embodied on the journey outward, by working imaginatively within the exoteric native tradition through ritual celebration and story. They embody my evolving creation mythology in synchronicity with my time and place.
Seeding Models for Spirituality, Creativity and Power

The ‘fabric’ for this block comes from the literature and my perception of the stories and interactions between the women who have contributed to my quest for connection between spirituality, creativity and empowerment. My re-sources are the taped interviews and their transcripts, the entries in my journal, and my reflections upon the latter sources, as well as thoughts arising from the process of making a series of quilts for the seasonal cycles and festivals of the Celtic calendar set within the context of the southern hemisphere (Solomon, 1997).

As mentioned in the Introduction to my book (ibid:2), I see the three aspects of women’s spirituality, creativity and empowerment as three sides of a triangle particularly as an inverted or ‘pubic’ triangle, which represents the life-giving energies of woman. As symbol, I would surround this triangle with a circle so that the three points are on the circumference, to suggest a flow of energy between the sources of spirituality, creativity, and power held by the triangle, and spread via the circle to the community. This interaction with the wider world also flows back into the triangle.

I see the separation of the qualities of creativity, spirituality and power for the sake of reporting their interconnection in this research text to be contradictory, artificial, misleading, and ultimately disempowering. However, it may help in this process of reporting to remember that ‘we do experience ourselves and our visions as rooted in being and truth’, (Daly in Christ, 1989:15). In addition, by recognising the limited and finite aspects in which we are experiencing these ‘truths’, we allow the empowerment which comes from admitting the elements of change and diversity in to play. Carol Christ acknowledges the truth of our
autobiographical perspectives in time and space as ‘the product of embodied thinking not (as) eternally or universally valid thought’ (Christ, 1989:15, her emphasis).

From my reflections during the research period the connection between spirituality, creativity and empowerment became increasingly evident. It also became clear that transformation, or be-coming into ‘wholeness’, what Bruteau (in Nicholson, 1989:75) calls ‘the defining character of the new consciousness’, does not occur in a vacuum, in isolation. It happens when ‘confirmation of one’s own Reality awakens that Reality in another’, (Daly in Christ and Plaskow (eds), 1989:200-201) and is a process I have noted more than once in my journal entries as ‘listening/hearing each other into be-ing’, or, as another woman who participated in the rituals verbalises it, as ‘that deep place in myself which recognises that deep place in others’.

Since I am intending to describe here mutual or reciprocal actions rather than products, I have referred to these terms using verbs rather than nouns: creating, spiritualising, empowering. Though suggesting a passivity, which I feel is not appropriate to the process of transformation I am describing, a verb is equally valid as a past participle: created, spiritualised, empowered. Understood in the scientific context of the wave/particle differentiation, where the energy is in the flux, both verbs and participles are active and relevant.

Patching Womenspeak
The book I wrote (Solomon, 1997) and the quilts I made during the time of research are both process and outcome. They are the process by which I have embodied a re-imaging of myself as a creating and spiritualised being. By looking at them in exhibition, or hanging them at home as symbol of the season and all that it brings, they continue to present the
opportunity to discover layers of understanding from the interaction between the self/viewer and their design, thereby uncovering new layers of understanding perhaps not fully recognised. This is the interaction which occurs between self/soul and myth/story, from which we create the reality we experience as ourselves, our community. (This idea is discussed more fully in Block 4.)

The variety and diversity of perceptions and positioning amongst the women in the research groups in relation to creating, spiritualising and empowering is obvious. It may be possible to assert (although not relevant to the design and purpose of my research), that those of us who met regularly on full moon and sabbats (seasonal festivals) have a deeper integration of the spiritual, the sacralising energy in our lives, than the patchwork group. It may be that we have a less well-defined understanding of the creative process than some of the quilters. These are suppositions beyond the bounds of this thesis.

What is worthwhile recognising is the possibility both from within the group of women who collaborated with me in this project and in the wider domain, for what Mary Daly (in Plaskow and Christ, 1989:199) refers to as ‘the work of Be-Friending’, that activity which involves a ‘metapatterning participation in Be-ing’. Different from the process of forming a deep personal friendship between two women, it implies ‘the creation of an atmosphere.....Every woman who contributes to the creation of this atmosphere functions as a catalyst for the evolution of other women’. It is an ontological process in the recognition of wholeness and connectedness rather than otherness, and may be what Janice Raymond (1991:86) has termed ‘spiritual friendship’. It is in this spirit that I report the interaction of my own voice with the voices of the women whom I have been Be-friending.
Spiritualising

The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, our anger as purifying, and our power to nurture and create, but also to limit and destroy when necessary, as the very force that sustains life. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions. We can move beyond narrow, constricting roles and become whole.

Starhawk (1979:24)

...the assumption that divinity represents rationality, order, and transcendence of finitude, change, and death has rendered the prehistoric Goddesses baffling to scholars because the images of the prehistoric Goddesses celebrate change in the form of birth, death, and transformation.

Christ (1991:82)

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge that connects them is formed by the erotic - the sensual - those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

Audre Lorde (in Plaskow and Christ (eds), 1989:210)
In tune with the assertion by James Hillman 91975:147) ‘that individuation is a perspective.... we do not see individuation, but by means of it’ (his emphasis), I see spirituality also as a perspective, and attitude, a worldview which gives life and meaning to the story through which we interpret ourselves and our journey. Creativity and power are two facets of our experience and in telling their story we are also telling the story of the spirit. The process of their relational interdependence may be symbolised by one of the earliest of religious images, the orobourus - the snake biting its tail in the great cycle of continuity and dynamic change; or by the spiralling journey inwards on the path of the labyrinth into the Self, to the source of creativity and power, and out again to its expression.

On many individual spiritual quests, women writers are revealing through a deepening understanding of the connection between self and body in relation to creation and to the sacred, the criteria Swimme, (1992) and Maturana and Varela (1987) have housed in scientific language as ‘differentiation, subjectivity (or autopoesis) and communion’. Starhawk (1982), Keller (1986), Eisler (1990), Spretnak (1991), and many others have referred to these concepts in their various ways as elemental to a sacralising consciousness. In different languaging, arising from experience and reflection, they are articulating these principles which Reason (1994), in summarising twentieth century theorists on the evolution of human consciousness, has schematised as the third and not yet realised phase of evolution. These writers are speaking this process of creating and spiritualising as being present not only in ancient myth, but as residing in the body/soul of Self as woman, and as manifestation of Goddess, of Great Mother.
This growing realisation amongst women writers on spirituality has come from an interest in the history and prehistory of ancient cultures which worshipped a female deity, through a growing need for a feminist perception of spirituality and through an analysis of the ways male-clergied religions have instituted and maintained a secondary status for women (Daly, 1973; Radford Ruether, 1975; Christ, 1980; Gimbutas, 1974, 1989, 1991; Eisler, 1996).

I have sensed and continue to sense that there is a deep, strong and vital connection between women’s sense of self, or personal power, and our understanding of our generative role and ourselves as agents of our own spiritual expressions. I sense it as a connection which goes back to earliest times, as a sacralising of all aspects of life, in which all of society valued traits which in patriarchy are labelled feminine and which relegate women to the role of service and consequent disempowerment: qualities such as compassion, nurturance, cooperation, and the capability of sensing natural cycles and flow. It is a sense which is not only supported by archaeological evidence and the re-visioning of myths. It is being recognised and re-spected by the women’ spirituality movement and practised through the re-visioning of ancient indigenous traditions and myths of Europe and the Middle East, often incorporating the wisdoms of other native traditions (Stein, 1987, Starhawk, 1980, Ardinger, 1992).

When I refer to the word ‘sense’ in this way, it has a common boundary with Rupert Sheldrake’s (1981) ‘morphic resonance’, and what Reason (1994:20) borrowing from Kremer, refers to as ‘original participation’. In societies characterised by a consciousness of original participation ‘...economic activities, myth, ceremony and story-telling knit together in an integrated whole;...(B)ody, emotions, mind and spirit will all be integrated aspects of the whole human person, integral aspects of their way of sensing and experiencing’. He goes on to state that this sense is
'not far away from us all for it remains at the ground of our being' and although we are relatively unaware of it, it nevertheless brings with it 'an experience of deep connectedness' (ibid, emphasis mine).

In our patchwork groups, as in our ritual circles, we have the opportunity to live connectedness and diversity, linking rather than ranking. We are not experiencing a phase in the evolution of consciousness in the way Wilber (in Kremer, 1996:42-47) develops a lineal paradigm based on progression. We are recovering a 'dynamic union, ...a process in which the one ever becomes the many and the many are ever reunited with and in the one' (Bruteau in Nicholson, 1989:72). In "(T)he shadow of Evolutionary Thinking", Kremer (1996) talks about recovering ancient memory for the future as a 'medicine of remembrance with all that it entails, be it fear, pain, guilt, anger', which will open up the indigenous mind where conversations are engaged in not primarily for 'knowing reality', but for nurturing and being nurtured, thereby fostering generativity and potentiality, as a 'fundamentally mutual or reciprocal activity'.

Ritualising and Mythologising

'Our full moon groups provide a place where I can speak about my deepest perceptions of my inner spiritual journey in a safe place. While this often involves mundane things, it takes me to a place where I can practice alternative ways of knowing. The group provides a context for the expression of our passion for the Mother, the female metaphor, of our passion for ourselves. It hasn’t been possible for this to be heard in any formal spiritual tradition.'

(Marion, interview 5).
As participants in a group which meets on full moons and the seasonal festivals, we could well have been addressing the question which Carol Christ raised in 1973. In the context of being a student at an all-male theological college in the USA, Christ asked: "What would women's religious experience be like when it was articulated in women's own language, not forced onto the structures of male theology?" (and therefore liturgy.)

In the process of answering this question, we have found ourselves as priestesses, agents in our own spiritual expressions. We create our own ritual for celebrations which give meaning to our existence as women, as mothers, and as dwellers upon the earth. As sisters and daughters, mothers and wise women, in the ritual setting of sacred space, we are teaching ourselves through our own stories and the re-storying of ancient myth to trust our experiences, not through the deemed holy text of a transcendent male God, who has created us as Other, and then stands independently over against his creation. This is a system represented by a church which mirrors his exclusivity without taking part in the world, which nevertheless remains absolutely dependent on him for its origin and its salvation (Keller, 1986).

One woman in speaking about our ritualising the full moons in the circle said that although she

`'...had read extensively about the Goddess for some years before our meetings began...it was the coming together every full moon, consciously putting our combined attention to Her manifestation in our experience and feelings that gave me this wonderful sense of connection with the earth and her rhythms, an opening to a deeper connection with myself and the`
transient nature of all things, and most importantly, a
connection with my ancient female spiritual heritage -
which I now recognise as my birthright.’

(Angela, interview 1).

Another talked about the circle meetings as
‘a kind of group meditation, where I learn to listen to
myself, feeling into myself and speaking from within -
I almost take it for granted now. The deep connection
this creates with others in the group allows me to both
speak and hear from that deep place in myself, and
doing so maintains the connection.’

(Glenda, interview 3)

Women have long carried the projection of men’s fears of dissolution
manifest in evil and the dark, which couples us with earth, nature and
irrationality, whilst they carry the superior energies of heaven, and
reason residing in the ‘logos’ (Griffin, 1978; Berry, 1982; Woodman,
1990). We are finding ways to re-image this myth through the re-telling
of ancient myth as it could have been told both in the context of a non-
patriarchal society, and in the context of our present day search for self
identification and self determination within the context of patriarchy.

To use Carol Christ’s (1980) analogy, we are learning to ‘dive deep’, like
Inanna and Persephone on their seasonal voyage into the underworld.
We are diving beneath the shipwreck of patriarchy for new/old story, and
surfacing with new/old awareness. We are re-cognising it as a sacred and
parthenogenetic (autopoetic) journey to meet the self as creator and
redeemer. Instead of, or perhaps as well as, fearing the dark places
within, becoming victim to the depressions, feeling guilty and blaming
ourselves, we stand in the process. Recognising the fecundity of the void,
we look for and nurture the seeds of potential for the new insight and growth they contain.

We are bringing to the surface the treasure of our power through the creation of a meaning which conceptualises and validates our experiences. We work within a theory of the unconscious long before Freud cast it in socio-sexist terms at the beginning of the twentieth century, or Jung relegated it to the realm of the archetypal animus and anima, thereby perpetuating the objectification of part of the Self and its complementary hierarchy, and removing the immanence which is inherent in the ontology of an integrated mind/body (Feman Orenstein, 1990; Plumwood, 1993). We are re-cognising that ‘persons of both sexes can be psychologically mature only when each is self-defining, that is, when each determines her or his own values and goals’ (Mattoo and Jones in Nicholson (ed), 1989:143).

By virtue of being ourselves, expressing our perceptions of the world and having them heard, learning to feel comfortable with the light and trusting the dark, we are reclaiming a spiritual experience which is personal, creative, grounded and embodied. In the process we are creating a collective memory of a subjective existence which de Beauvoir (in Keller, 1986:21) had said women lacked because we had no historical religion and culture. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that spiritual feminists are finding the roots of an historical religion and culture which in its repression has placed most women in the position of being unconsciously alienated from ourselves.

In our ritual circles in sacred space, what we see budding, blossoming, just as we see the wattle coming into flower at Imbolc, are visible keepers of the invisible, keepers of the flame, women returning from the dark abyss of invisibility and creating ourselves anew, unfolding our gift of life. We
are realising that we have no need of a saviour, of redemption, nor to get off the wheel of rebirth to go to a better place; that our deepest experiences are experiences of connection with each other, with the earth and with the world.

'...it isn’t thinking that lets me know I AM. my experience of Being is lodged somewhere else altogether. I feel it as a deep connection with my physical, emotional, psychic self...Consciousness of where I’ve come from, what I’m made of, my human lineage, my connection to the earth and all of life - all of these things are part of the story, part of the experience.'

(Angela, interview 1)

Creating

....art is a spiritual presence that is embodied in matter, whose power to transform humans, to literally create new stages of awakening in its viewers, exemplifies the shamanic principle that creation is literal.

Feman Orenstein (1990:9)

...art is a magical food that we ingest through the eyes, but which brings a subtle chemistry to our beings in a way that is similar to what we experience when we eat. Art transforms us and makes us into what we see in the same way that food transforms us into what we eat.

(ibid:63)
(We are developing)...a new type of art through the
discovery and analysis of the matriarchal form of
society...in which people were completely integrated
into the symbolic fulfilment of their complex
practices...in which art was a continuum that included
the body, sensuality, and the cosmically experienced
world.


In order to free our psyches, we must carefully choose
our images and the messages they convey.

Iglehart Austen (1990:xv)

Similar to the dynamic by which power is operated in the western
cultural ethos, creativity has been cast within an hierarchical framework.
Within this model, as Catherine Keller (1986:222) states, ‘authority and
cliche’ become substitutes for ‘desire and creativity’. Many women can
relate to this position, both in the practice of childraising and the pursuit
of home making ‘crafts’, skills once considered the focus (Greek for
‘hearth’) of the economy (a derivative of the Greek ecos meaning home).
These terms are also being redefined in our own terms as we relate our
experiences. We are recognising the validity of the so-called feminine
role and values, without making them a normative or essentialist code.

Very ancient story tells how the beginnings of a feeling of creativity - the
urge(ncy) - emerges from an affinity with, an identification with
nothingness, with what was expressed in ancient creation myth as the
Void. And it is here, in revisioning myth and revisiting the Void, that
many women are beginning to source our creativity myths again.
Amongst writers, these include Spretnak (1978), Stone (1979), Feman
Orenstein (1990), McVicker Edwards (1991), Monaghan (1994), Walker
(1996); as well as writers of fiction such as Zimmer Bradley (1982, 1993, 1997) and such other as discussed by Gloria Feman Orenstein (1990) in her chapter entitled “Cycling: Restoring Matristic Storytelling”.

We nevertheless find ourselves as inheritors of a different cultural story of creativity today which asserts ‘talent’, ‘training’, ‘gift’ - and, if you are lucky, ‘genius’, as the sources. These are used as terms of exclusion by privilege, and separation by unworthiness, and have the effect of disempowering.

There are women within the contemporary quilting field who are consciously working towards the recognition of quilts as an art form. One of the patchwork quilters interviewed in my group referred to another quilter whose work was being acquired for a national collection of Australian quilts. The particular piece was in a ‘traditional’ design, and the woman who made the quilt did not see it as a work of art, but ‘just something she’d always done’ (Barbara, interview 9). Her comment reflects the marginalisation of women’s creative processes, particularly women’s textile arts, as a form of women’s work under the heading of utilitarian: quilts made for children, friends, as fundraisers, for charities and hospitals.

It is often in giving away the quilt to relative or friend, not necessarily in its making, that women feel the creative energies. The conventional form of patchworking is considered by some to be less creative, though a patchwork quilter who designs quilts, selling instructions for their making to a national magazine, asserts that choice of fabrics and colours creates an individual approach to each quilt. Nevertheless, for her the challenge of designing a quilt infuses the project with greater sense of being creative, with a comparable sense of personal worth. The sense of worth comes from doing something productive, that is, which earns
income. (Maureen, interview 6). For another woman, the gift of a quilt made by her offers a similar sense of satisfaction in terms of productivity: ‘I would rather give people something I have made than give them something expensive’.

(Margaret, interview 4).

Conventional patchworking (and contemporary perhaps still) is mostly perceived as utilitarian, quilts being either for beds or as wall decoration. Amongst the women I spoke with, their true value is hidden: quilts provide a sense of nurturance, and connection. When a child needs warmth and comfort, s/he can wrap herself in the quilt Mum or Aunty made for her. There is something beyond the practical in the personal bonding which a quilt can induce. I remember knowing when making my first quilt that it needed to be for my son, Leo; and he knew it too. It is probably the least attractive quilt I have made, but as symbol of unqualified love it needs nothing more than to be his.

In the above mentioned situations there is a recognition of ourselves as both generators and nurturers. We are consciously engaged in the process of parthenogenesis by participating in the creation of our worlds in accord with our self-organising properties. We are birthing qualities of ‘differentiation, autopoiesis and communion’, those qualities characteristic of the creative act of the universe as defined by Berry and Swimme (1992).

Creative energies are often recognised and experienced in the ritual group through a visualising meditation which allows us to physically sense the source of our creativity in the body. For one it is felt as emanating from the heart, for another from around the area of the third eye, for another from the solar plexus. For the ritual we create each month at the full moon, the structure is minimal and the space for creating activities
according to need is experienced as both potential for creativity and empowerment. One woman from the full moon group said

'The need to express my spiritual life is so important to me that I can’t function without a group like that. We create ourselves, and are empowered by verbalising what we want to achieve for ourselves. This helps bring it into reality: being able to speak and have your vision validated by other women has helped me persist on my path, so that at this stage of my life what I spoke of two years ago is in fact evolving.'

(Marion, interview 5)

I identified with the process another woman spoke about in her experience of being heard when she said that through our listening we

'help each other to contact the essence of our creative source, the 'to be' aspect of ourselves, which is the evolution towards life. We gain confidence by being validated. The group grows us in confidence so that we can step over social personae, judgements, things which daily bog us down in relationship, to find something more important, more essential. If you're able to do that for others, that's magic!'.

(Glenda, interview 3)

**Empowering**

Defining ourselves as powerful frees us to create personally, socially, and artistically. Each insight, each action, every song sparks us onward,

Debrida in Spretnak (1982:148)
The simplest and most basic meaning for the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.

Christ and Plaskow (eds) (1979:227)

The psychological qualities we so painstakingly aim for with our therapy sessions and spiritual practices are the very qualities indigenous people have always assumed. The social attributes we struggle to attain with our social justice movements are the very ones that defined nature-based cultures for 99 per cent of our existence as human beings.

Glendinning (1994:137)

Reclaiming our personal power means reclaiming our ability to engage reality, not retreat from it...and gives us the courage to demand a change in the basis of society's power.

Starhawk (1982:69)

...a person emerges who knows her own endurance as weblike, woven of the complex integrity of her unfurling selves, each at once receptively, patiently feeling the world as it is, and creatively, urgently making the world as it will be.'

Keller (1986:224)

Power is felt, exercised and re-cognised in relationship. The major models for conducting relationship which have shaped contemporary culture - be it for spiritual expression, political power, in conflict or love
are derived from the dominant-subordinate mode (Eisler, 1987, 1996).
In writing about how women deal with conflict, psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller (1991) acknowledges the inherent dualism in the gender divide (whilst presenting the scenario for a radical monist perspective of otherness), by pointing out that there has been another model practised simultaneously by women which does not operate on the basis of gaining power over others. In this model women try instead to interact with other people in ways which foster everyone's development. This model, although practiced with great skill, is nevertheless practiced precariously within a dualistic context of basic inequality. 'In this context, Mutually enhancing interactions cannot flourish fully...' (ibid:134, my emphasis).

It may be that such ways of dealing with conflict without bringing to bear the tradition of domination for control are deemed in themselves to disadvantage women in their operation of personal power. By squinting your eyes, as when looking at some patchwork quilts, the possibility of focussing on the secondary/alternative pattern is evident. Much recent feminist writing points out that it is the context in which the relating occurs which gives value to the behaviour (Keller, 1986; Eisler, 1987, 1996; Glendinning, 1994).

The possibility for a revisioning of power relations is what Kremer (1996:46) in his discussion of indigenous consciousness considers an awareness of being 'actors in a relationship of mutuality', or 'the indigenous ego in communal conversation'. (When he uses the term 'indigenous', he is not basing it on an essentialist concept, but as an ongoing conversation with everything). The question is ever present in our conversation: how do we change the context or way of being so that the ethic of mutuality/interdependence with each other and the earth and its creatures and energies is recognised as the generative power which sustains life's Mysteries?

Annabelle Solomon, Between the Worlds Master Soc.Ecol. Thesis
At various stages in the research process I noted that all of the women in both the ritual and patchwork groups had and were experiencing situations in their lives where they felt disempowered. For myself it manifest as continual struggle to support myself and son physically and emotionally as a sole parent in a social, political, and religious context which acknowledges financial and moral primacy to the nuclear family. For another, a sense of unworthiness was elicited by inability to gain employment in her professional field; another was dealing with the crises of sexual abuse in her family; several felt diminished at times by various expressions of sexual relationships; another suffered chronic ill-health; the commercial artist felt her creative block as disempowering.

In the practice of spiritual metaphor sourced in the generative power of woman, neither the creation of sacred space nor healing are acts performed upon an individual, or by an individual with higher authority, as in other traditions of religious orthodoxy. We are learning to recognise and accept our own energies in these processes, within the supportive atmosphere of the circle, which as one participant says, ‘does not mean the others needing to comment, criticise, intervene or judge’. She continues

‘A lot of us are tired of being told what is and isn’t allowed on spiritual subjects. We’re fed up with being lectured by authority figures - usually male! The absence of such figures in the circle is one of its pleasures.’

(Marian, interview 11)

Nor can agency simply be claimed through the power of what Edward Sampson (1993) calls ‘the self-contained individual’, an activity I describe in Block 1 as pulling oneself up by the bootlaces. Through realising
ourselves as be-ing in the act of creating and sacralising our lives, we can start to re-cognise what Sampson, Keller (1986), Eisler (1987, 1996) and other analysts of the human condition previously cited may consider an ethos which constructs the individual as having degrees of autonomy which depend on the construction of the ‘serviceable Other’, (Sampson, 1993) whilst actively striving to hide the lie that self-sufficiency and individuation (or capacity to strive for full personal development) is available to everyone. It is a lie in which the theoretical foundations of not only psychology but the whole western project, including creativity, spiritual integrity and the invisibility of mothering are entrenched. In this system the construction of Self goes hand in hand with the construction and suppression of Other, expressly for the purpose of maintaining a dominating power.

For the first twelve months of the ritual group’s meetings, there were entries in my journal about not being heard by the group, and the feelings of powerlessness that situation engenders in me. There seemed to be a reluctance on the part of the group to admit to what came to be known as ‘negative energy’. My experiences with alternative ways of healing were often about striving to admit the light. The dark remained in the zone of ‘negative’ power, giving off ‘bad vibes’, together with unconsciously held fears about the shadow (of evil), pain and suffering, which have been projected onto women in general, and extrapolated to nature by cultural myth (Griffin, 1978; George, 1992). I started to realise how deeply entrenched such views are, noting in my journal that on one occasion

‘I chose to mouth platitudes, deny and repress my feelings over and over. The dark became even darker, and the negative feelings even more ‘unnatural’ in such a light. My relationship to the dark side of life was one of fear and punishment - ultimately it was simply not supposed to exist.’

It became more evident over time that we were reclaiming our understanding of the generative power of the dark, particularly as we related it to the cycles of the moon and the seasons, realising that ‘the conception of the vision-to-be realised in the future cycle occurs in the dark moon phase of the previous cycle’ (George, 1992:98). Listening to people speak from their dark place became more comfortable, and again and again I note that I am validated in the speaking/listening space we offer each other, and no longer feel myself victimised as I speak of my difficulties, no longer a victim. I write of it as

‘a feeling which registers in my body, through which I feel motivated to take myself down another path towards a possibly different outcome. I have more capacity to choose. This is what I perceive to be empowerment.’

Beginning at our own hearths, we are reclaiming our woman-heritage as our power. For so long kept in the dark, it is retained and felt in our bodies. In this process we intuitively retell ancient myth which resonates with our own stories, and heightens our awareness that our very being arises out of the formless potential embodied by the night (Sjoo and Mor, 1987; Starhawk, 1989; George, 1992). In my journal I record that

‘our words are touching our source, our unity, in touch with a rhythm that is ancient and in harmony with our lives as women. An invitation is inherent in the speaking and being heard to re-cognise, reconstruct our power as women.’

Again stepping outside the reductionist dualistic framework which sees self as separate from other and opposes the energies of dark and light, we can be more response-able to the inevitable mini-cycles of psyche/soul.
We become aware in our bodies of the regenerative potential of so-called negative energies, re-cognising them as part of the cycle, which must necessarily include destruction and death for there to be birth and life. This is the theme of my book about the seasonal festivals.

Stone (in Spretnak, 1982:70) placed Goddess spirituality in the arena of political action thus: "Goddess spirituality has grown from our consciousness-raising process; it has grown from US. It may be the ultimate heresy - and it may be what ultimately allows us to succeed where so many others have failed'. Whilst there may be contention amongst women speaking and writing from a feminist perspective about the requirement for political activism, a spiritual dimension to feminist expression has been vociferously emerging as a force for political change (Starhawk: 1982, 1979, 1989; Spretnak: 1993).

The sense of power which emerged from our engagement with each other in the ritual group had various and personal expressions, from the simple need to be heard in the group, to the capacity to take the energy felt as power into a worldly expression, and the latter often found roots in the former. For one woman

'...The key to empowerment is being able to express ourselves spiritually as women, because there's not much context for that!'

(Denise, interview 2)

Feminists whose writing include a spiritual dimension refer to power in similar ways; Starhawk displaces the dominant model of power-over with power-from-within. She calls power 'the subtle force that shapes reality' (1989:28). Rianne Eisler (1987) uses the imagery of the chalice (power with) and the blade (power over) to give title to her book which develops the theory for cultural change based on the partnership model,
itself derived from earlier prepatriarchal times when she claims that the ‘gender holistic’ model formed a society at one with itself and its environment. Audre Lorde (in Christ and Plaskow, 1989) talks about the ‘erotic’s electrical charge’, by which she means feeling deeply in the empowerment which assertion of the lifeforce brings us, a sharing of the power of each others’ feelings.

Carol Christ (1980) long ago identified a notion of power for women as insight and grounding, attributes coming from a clear knowledge of one’s ‘rooting in nature’ and personal past. The effect of coming to this understanding is the ability to see a new patterning in our worldview, by revealing it as an integral intuition of a holistic reality. One woman in the full moon group talks about noticing ‘a new sense of groundedness’ after attending the circles for a year, and on thinking of the way she dealt with the deaths of both parents within the space of a year. She says

‘I know that the groundedness I feel is a kind of empowerment, and it both inspires and is fostered by ritual and creativity: ritual through our monthly and seasonal celebratory meeting and my own daily practice; creativity through the ways I was able to relate to my parents in the time leading to their deaths, and the ways I have been able to relate to them since. Our monthly meetings sharpen my consciousness of all this and enrich my life.’

(Angela, interview 1)

The need to forgive oneself (rather than be forgiven) was a recurrent theme in the ritual group, indicating a desire to address the unconsciously held psychic and emotional colonisation by the patriarchal psyche which has us doubt our ways of being and knowing, doubt the power of our very bodies. It is a step between the worlds of domination
and subordination, of blame and guilt, to re-cognise that ‘empowerment comes from within, from connection to the life force’, as Elinor Gadon (1989:376) has put it. In re-imaging our bodies as holy vessels which hold the promise of life we are rediscovering the creative connection by which we can create a different future.

The Homeric myth of Penelope, the passive and submissive wife of Odysseus, is unravelled from its psychopolitical patriarchal entanglements by Catherine Keller (1986) to restore the pre/post-patriarchal image of the Life-weaver, Arachne. In the Homeric myth the original Life-weaver, Arachne, is invited to compete, then punished for her beautiful weaving by another jealous creator, Athena. Penelope is a step further removed from both Arachne and Athena in the classic dyad which underpins western cultural relationship for women: she has become the ‘soluble self’ which complements the ‘separate self’ in the endless round of creation (ibid:13).

Arguments and myths which support the essentially different natures of the sexes have come down to us through religion, philosophy, and psychology. One of the most convincing and empowering scientific evidence of difference for women is posited by Irene Coates (1993:4), in which she urges women to make sure that ‘our subjective sense of selves ... keep pace with the rapid increase in objective knowledge’. Coates’ journeyings into the world of ancient myth and modern science to posit mutuality and difference - giving and receiving in equal measure - is a new/old foundation from which to rebuild the myth of power by testosterone (ibid:119).

As Arachne women we are reclaiming our subjective selves. Trying on the original meaning of Penelope’s name: ‘She with a Web on her Face’, (Keller, 1986:217) we are learning to see the world through a web. We are
consciously reclaiming the experience of the life force flowing through our womb-looms, feeling the world in its immanence to envision the possible, tuning into a deeper frequency. Remembering earlier images of snakes, sea monsters and spiders, we look into the darkness of history, myth symbol and story, the abyss, the womb, to feel the source of our power, weaving an ‘arachnean spirituality...a way of becoming not prescribed from the outside but sprung from the whorl of internalised relations...a way of being self at any moment: a way of radical integrity’ (ibid:225).
BLOCK 4: GNOWNINGs AFFIRMED....fruiting, ripening....forming seed

The process by which our selves are constituted, however, is ongoing, never over and done with...dialogues are not something that we can ever simply enter and leave; life itself is dialogic. We move from one to another, each shading into the next, and the next, and so on.

Sampson (1993:107)

Although most people world-wide know that women generate our own eggs and hand on our own genetic material to our children, this knowledge remains locked into laboratories, part of the science of biology, of genetics, and has still not been integrated into other contexts such as religion or psychology; or....into anthropology.

Coates (1993:79)

There are daily acts we can engage in...There are research studies to launch...There is political work to accomplish...Finally, there is ceremony to perform, for the ceremonies we create will shape the politics we engage in, the dreams we live, and the meaning of our lives.

Glendinning (1994:211)

We are in desperate need of new forms of social organisation which can provide an environment free from judgement and coercion and which can catalyse transformation.

Hallowell (1995:42)
My experiences as woman and mother combined with a growing understanding of the dynamic forces which form my interpretation of history, with self as participant, have politicised my viewpoint about being woman and mother. Though seemingly not able myself to act directly to effectively change what I see to be injustices regarding my own situation and in the wider community, I am mystified by the fact that as women we seem so easily to comply with a second-rate share at best of just about everything - certainly in the naming of power, creativity and the numinous, (though of course there are many of us who do not sit quietly and in silence). I can now identify the weight I feel from centuries of oppression, of being forced into a mould not of my own making.

I have indicated my understanding that feminist theorists (Starhawk, Christ, Keller) and archaeologists (Gimbutas, Eisler, Stone) are uncovering the influences which have formed our interpretation of history. Early feminist theory (de Beauvoir is an example) often decried the oppression arising from the assumed ‘givens’ based in biological necessity, by which women have been denied access to power and self-determination in a patriarchal context. I feel that these ideas are but part of a worldview which still holds sway over the way many people view other nationalities and cultures, that is, from a monist, reductionist, androcentric and supremacist perspective.

Feminist perspectives can overlook the impact on woman’s lives of having children, and the very real similarities between the world of the family and that of the political arena (Freely, 1995). It was Sarah Ruddick (1980) who suggested that mothering required intelligence, arguing that many valuable forms of thinking begin in the home which are ‘no more relative to its particular reality (the growing child) than the thinking that
arises from scientific, religious, or any other practice’ (ibid:348). The value of maternal practice has historically been excluded and devalued by the ancient patriarchal demarcation between the private and public, becoming confused with and obscured by so called biological necessity.

During the period of this research project, I became aware of the life-force held in my own body: the mammalian egg, discovered by German biologist, Karl Ernst Von Baer in 1827 (Coates, 1993:73). Embodying this realisation has the potential to free us from centuries of misinformation about the female body as merely a receptacle in which the ‘matter’ is formed around the introduced generative principle from the male, manifest in the sperm, a belief promulgated by Hellenic myth and which has informed myth and the psyches of women and men over two millennia (ibid:54; Solomon, 1997:49, note 4).

The effect of this realisation in my understanding of where power arises, both in fact and as possibility, has brought with it a sense of clarity and urgency as well a despair. The realisation of the generative power of the female body is in symbiotic relationship to the way the creative principle is thought about in general, another principle deeply entrenched in patriarchal culture and psyche/soul as emanating from the male. This dyad, restructured as a monad in terms of a single male god who holds the life-force, continues to influence our ideas not only about spirituality but about the creative arts with the tenacity of the myths which constitute the patriarchal perception of reality.

I am not willing to believe that motherhood and feminism, or spirituality and feminism for that matter, are incompatible. Experience of our bodies as expressions of life-force, of the ineffable Mystery of creation, connects our internal sense of our own being with external knowledge, a connection which can empower our creativity because ‘our generative
capacity is the centre of our creativity: to be creative we need an internal sense of our own being’ (Coates, 1993:5).

Having this sense of our physiology offers us insight to regain an ancient sense of personal power as seed-bearers, nurturers and creators. From this perspective I began to see that there is no need to engage the myths which drive a wedge between power and nurture, or creativity and mothering, or beauty and worth, and so fall under the spell of the patriarchally determined role of ‘the soluble self’ (Keller, 1986:13) or the ‘Institution of Motherhood’ (Freely, 1995:192). We can be Penelopes who do not continually unravel our weavings, but complete the creative pieces of work on our womb-looms in full knowledge of the primordial Mystery flowing generationally through the mammalian egg generated in our bodies, without which life is not possible. We can be Athenas who welcome the beautiful creations of Arachnes, life-weavers all. It is this biological fact, aside from all other considerations about nature and nurture, which we must not be afraid to claim as source of power.

**Revisioning the Myths by which we Create Reality**

The connection between spirituality, creativity and power has become for me been an ongoing interaction which has removed these terms from the abstract, which implies non-existence, to posit them as activities which reveal potentialities in their relationship. In describing a scientific epistemology of creativity within a spiritual perspective, Swimme (1992:39) talks about the autopoiesis of the universe as a 'mutually evocative reality' which comes about through a 'listening', which is a 'quantum sensitivity' to 'primordial communication' from 'voices of the past.' When we stare out into the night sky in wonder we stare back at our own generative matrix, we listen to the psychic depths of the universe, we ponder 'those primal ripples that call us into being.' And in
our pondering we are 'the very mind of the galaxy in search of its inner depths' (ibid:44-45), the ultimate self-reflexive act which is creation.

Writing of the revisioning of psychology, Hillman (1975:154-164) recognises the power for change held in the imaginal field of myth and metaphor, as an expression of 'the soul's own activity following its wayward journey from insight to insight.' Since myths have the nature of 'fading into uncertainty', and metaphor has the habit of 'seeing through itself', they work on levels other than mere story or figure of speech. In speaking 'emotionally, dramatically, sensually, fantastically,' they elicit 'ways of perceiving, feeling and existing' (Hillman 1975:156).

Because through metaphor and myth 'conflicts become paradoxes' (ibid) they present us with the opportunity to create our world by finding the numinous in a congruency (or possibly conflict) between inner and outer landscapes. They allow us to slip between the worlds, to other modes of perception which Starhawk (1989:32) calls 'the mode of starlight vision where we can sense 'pathways as spaces in the whole.' This is different from ordinary perception which she likens to viewing a dark forest with a narrow flashlight beam 'that illuminates a lone leaf or a solitary stone.'

I see spirituality also as a perspective, rather than as an accumulated body of truth. As Hillman (ibid) puts it with regard to psychology, it is a way of knowing which 'run(s) parallel to other bodies of knowledge', allowing us the opportunity to be deviant and so see through binary forms which lead to power-over. In stepping aside from the familiar notion of a 'how to' canon, spirituality starts us imagining, going deeper, not relying on the myths of progress and empiricism to get nearer the truth, but helping us to create what we need by meeting the deviant discourse of the imagination 'as body and not only as thought' (ibid:161).
It is in this way that I understand my research to have been a creative and a spiritual process, and one that has empowered both myself and others. I do not wish to report on the findings/outcomes of my project as though they were a set of criteria which can be analysed down to their elements. My understandings or outcomes are more as the residue of a process that literally creates them. In recreating the myths we live by to include and recognise ourselves as agent and other, bearers of the life-force and compassionate destroyers, whole and in process, we can start to regard desire as the sacred prime mover, and freedom to be in mutuality as potent source. With a mythic and metaphorical perspective, we can create 'deviant' discourse, as opposed to the 'literal', (ibid:159) giving us a different basis/bias from which to tell our stories, and therefore construct our lives and self image.
THE BORDER: RE-STORYING THE GNOWINGS...composting

One of the most significant developments to emerge out of the contemporary feminist movement is the quest to reclaim that symbolising/naming power, to refigure the female self from a gynocentric perspective, to discover, revitalise and create a female oral and visual mythic tradition and use it, ultimately, to change the world.

Caputi (in Larrington, 1992:425)

...feminists are living the knowledge gained from tapping deep and ancient symbolic/mythic power to change our lives.

Culpepper quoted by Caputi (ibid:431 her emphasis)

Myth Making through Creative Quilt Making

The making of the quilts brought together a mythologising, a spiritualising and an empowering. It was clearly in this process that I felt the integration of these three aspects, and continue to do so. I find the spiralling process of fragmenting and connecting with fabric much more enlivening than the more lineal process of writing. Whilst I can recognise the empowerment of a friend from the moon circle feels in the creative act of writing ritual sequences, she says that empowerment is experienced at the time of the enactment of the ritual.

Although I started patchwork by learning some basis techniques which provided me with the background from which to step out creatively, I did not continue to work in the traditional form of quilt by constructing blocks to form regular patterns which are known generically by different names, and therefore easily recognisable and assessable on a technical
level. I wanted to express and elicit a different perspective through the use of visual image, which required my taking a new approach but which nevertheless 'runs alongside' the conventional concept of quilt. By acknowledging myself as quilt artist, not textile or fibre artist, I stay within the bounds of patchwork quilting, and push the borders.

The quilts are subject just as I am as their creator. And as symbols they embody the act of creation, and continue to enact creation with those who look at them just as surely as they created me as I cut and stitched them. In this way they are clearing a pathway for mythologising, as do all images, from graffiti and television commercials to great art and award winning movies. As images and myth, the quilts are the fruits of the cycles which return in the season, and it is hoped that they suggest a space for ambivalence through which can come another looking. It is my intention to make the quilts available for loan to interested groups. And, as promised in the book (Solomon, 1997: 13), I will create new quilts for those which 'leave' the circle, through which I will continue to embody my own connection to the cycles of the seasons, and the pulse of the Mother as the wheel turns.

In this project I have sought new ways to find expression for myself and a growing appreciation of myself and others as creative and spiritual expressions of the universe, in an interaction of being empowered and being empowering. Knowledge, like creativity, spirituality and power, is a human construction with multiple realities. My intention has been to reconstruct the world at the only point at which it exists for me: in the mind/body unity, at which point I recognise myself as not only an active constructor of my own world, (Guba, 1990:27) but enfolded in the world of others, human and non-human. Through this form of original participation, when deep perception of spiritual and creative energies as sourced in ourselves becomes part of daily awareness, it is possible for
new understandings about relationship to emerge. A paradigm shift can occur in terms of seeing power as a network (the web on Penelope's face), and the creation of knowledge by means of process.

Desiring the Book
The book (Solomon 1997) works on the three levels of Guba’s (1990:27) schemata, the ontological, epistemological and methodological, although as Guba points out, the distinction between ontology and epistemology is obliterated from the constructivist perspective. I wrote the text of the book as both an epistemological and ontological process, in order to bring into form available for dialogue, the knowledge I had acquired in developing, refining and practising the perspectives about spirituality, creativity and power. I wanted this form to be accessible to the wider groups of women represented in this study: those of us who seek to sacralise our lives by observing the earth's festivals; and those of us who enjoy the creative process through making quilts. The presentation of an emerging tradition of women's earth-centred spirituality in Australia and my quilt making process in the book both demonstrates and is researching lived experience (Van Manen 1994).

To use Van Manen's (1994:34) terminology, my research demonstrates an 'action sensitive pedagogy'. It has been activated by a phenomenon which seriously interests me as a commitment to my be-ing in the world: the empowerment of myself and women through revisioning creativity and spirituality. The experience has been investigated as I lived it (rather than just being conceptualised), and essential themes reflected on through the literature, and the artforms of quilt making and writing. I have remained strongly oriented to the phenomena which gave rise to the research. And the significance of the three parts to the overall design of the total textual structure has contributed to the questioning process in a balanced and productive way.
The book together with the quilts has been integral to revisioning a worldview for the future out of the past. I believe that making sense of our cultural festivals by aligning them to their deeply spiritual mythologies (Solomon 1997), rather than allowing them to be coopted by the forces of an economic rationalism, will create ways 'to achieve a... fundamental deepening of our modes of comprehension' of what Spretnak calls 'the unitive ground of the astonishing range of spontaneous subjectivity that is in and around us' (1993:22). And by experiencing the seasons in ritual expression we are developing subtle awarenesses which test conceptual knowledge and already perceived notions of reality.

Feelings - as Despair - as Power

In looking at the rise of the more 'feminine' concepts in the new sciences, such as the principles of inherent interconnectedness and relatedness, Linda Jean Shepherd encourages us to move with the advancement of consciousness by 'deal(ing) with its powers as they exist in the shadows and explore how we can assist their emergence' (1993:17).

We now know, after centuries of believing another story, that the 'value free' authority of the 'objective' empiricism of the Newtonian worldview is not supported by the theories of quantum physics. Yet daily I seem to feel the effects of this mechanistic perspective in my life, not just in the destruction of the environment, but in my personal life as woman and mother. It is a feeling which I first recognised and can best describe as anger, moving sometimes into despair, at ever being able to change the way things are. It is painful, and in acknowledging the pain in the anger, something which I have allowed myself to do as a result of participating in the full moon rituals and making the artquilts, it has given me the courage to affirm my existence and released my power to act to express
my concerns, personal and global (Macy 1995). Or, to consider Swimmes's (1992) analogy, it could be said that my pain is the pain of the Milky Way, of the forests and the waterways, listening to itself in self-knowing. Maybe it is my anger which will help flush out the waterways, as the dry riverbed receives the flooding rain which sweeps away all in its path at the end of the drought.

**Feeling the Personal (Creative and Spiritual) as the Political**

I can identify with the quilters who are finding a sense of personal power by the acknowledgment of their skills in the public arena of financial rewards and recognition. My move to the public sphere through the limited edition of the book, exhibiting and selling quilts, and teaching workshops in creative quilting within a spiritual framework, has given me an opportunity to be heard and to express my listening to that archaic whisper - to participate in the universe's act of self-knowing (gnoving).

Recognition of my quilting work and the publication of the book via letters brings the 'wonder and joy' Macy (ibid:253) speaks of when we get a sense of 'coming home to our mutual belonging - and there is a new kind of power...deriving from some of the oldest and newest insights into the nature of reality'. One woman wrote that she admired my

`'strength and courage in sweeping away the old repetitive ways and forging new paths. The creative power and freedom you express gives others permission to tap into the source of their own inner creativity and spirit.'`

From a workshop situation another woman wrote that the mini ritual component at the beginning of the workshop focusing on the creative energies of the Wheel of the Year,

`'left me calm and fresh ready to experiment. I'd had a rough time a few weeks before with a nasty rejection of`
my work, not on its merits but because it was textiles. I was getting over it, but the little bit of ritual and public statement helped in the final healing of the wound.'

Another woman who has suffered for thirty years from clinical depression wrote a longer letter and said that on reading the book she had been

'stunned, physically and mentally, recognising what I and all women have lost, and glimpsing tiny beginnings of hope'.

She wrote about her experience of depression being strongest during the winter, and was empowered to read,

'the true meaning of this time - and particularly to learn that through the journey downwards into the darkness, its celebration and acceptance will take me naturally towards the light again.'

To quote her more fully:

'I'm sure that in those times, when people lived in balance with the natural world and celebrated seasons and the sun and the moon, that wise women would have some special ceremony, course, or way to help those like myself who were so vulnerable at this time. Or people like myself would never have suffered so because our lives and our entire selves would be in balance with the natural 'wheel'.

One woman simply wrote:

'Your writing is very real and elaborates/expands your quilts in a nicely balanced yet informative way. Thanks, Annabelle, for sharing your thoughts and your works.'
That's what I like to do - share. In sharing I feel power arising from within, and of autonomous self, realised in community. Together we are the 'primordial voices of mutual evocation' (Swimme, 1992), each celebrating in our own way the desire of the mysterious and numinous universe to bring itself into form. Starhawk (1989:154) says that the 'pull to burst beyond the limits of the socially conditioned mind seems to be a deep-seated human need.' In the act of creating the quilts, and by participating in ritual, I am experiencing a shift in awareness which is both subjective and which is shared in my interaction with others. Perhaps this is what Starhawk (ibid) describes as 'a continuum of experience... (W)hat begins in the imagination becomes real...the reality of the underlying energy currents that shape the universe.'

A Creation Story from Between the Worlds

Alone, awesome, complete within Herself, the Goddess, She whose name cannot be spoken, floated in the abyss of outer darkness, before the beginning of all things. And as She looked into the curved mirror of black space, She saw by her own light her radiant reflection, and fell in love with it. She drew it forth by the power that was in Her and made love to Herself, and called Her "Miria, the Wonderful". Their ecstasy burst forth in the single song of all that is, was, or ever shall be...'

(excerpted from Starhawk 1989:31)
At this time of the year, as the Wheel turns, there is an ending and a beginning. The snake, symbol of the power of life to renew itself, and thought by the ancestors to be eternal because of the annual sloughing of its skin, goes full circle and bites its tail. The warmth from the sun continues to fade, and the hours of daylight are growing shorter. In another seven weeks, in the middle of June, we will be celebrating the shortest day of the year at Winter Solstice.

Watching as the glorious colours of autumn fade and the trees become bare, I know that Samhain is not the first festival to bring the impending dark. It is actually the last of the four great festivals which celebrate the dark, yet it seems the most powerful. The earth first started to turn away from the sun in the middle of December, on the longest day of the year, the Summer Solstice. It is time to store up provisions with due care for the long winter months when the earth lies dormant. The last grains and fruits have been gathered, the series of harvests completed. Because Hallowe’en is known as the witches’ New Year, it seems appropriate to start my journey through the Wheel of the Year with this festival, although the first quilt I made in the series was in fact the Spring Equinox.

All new ventures, no matter what their intent, begin ‘in the dark’. For the Celts of old, peoples who lived in harmony with the light given by sun, moon and fire, each new day began in
the evening at sunset. With the ending of the year just gone and the now imminent and noticeable decline into darkness, Samhain is a time to give thanks for what has gone before, to take stock and to get ready for the renewal of life and the return of light. At Hallowe’en we recognize that the energy of darkness, feared and so often repressed and denied in our culture, is essential to new growth. During the preceding months we have been collecting the fruits of the earth born out of darkness.

It is said that at this time the veil between the worlds is thinnest. In our ritual we remember relatives and loved ones who have been received back into the womb of the Mother, to the darkness of the Underworld to await rebirth. We offer libations in thanksgiving and hope, to pay respect to past ventures and old friends. And to give power to our dreaming we ritually and symbolically plant seeds for the future, speaking our aspirations out loud.

The law of the natural cycle is that seeds must stay for a period in the dark, warm earth until the shoots of new life appear at Imbolc, the beginning of spring. In the season of Samhain we move forwards to embrace the dark and tell our stories to each other in order to create our new dreaming, new stories out of the creative energies of the dark. It is out of loss that we are feeling a resurgent consciousness, the loss of the light hours, the loss of Persephone as she descends into the Underworld to bring new life to dead loved ones, the loss of the wise women who carry the now derogatory titles of hags and witches.

**Hecate’s Cloak**

In creating a quilt for Hallowe’en I experienced directly that energy of darkness which drives creativity and creation. I had only a tiny seed of an idea, an *ovum* and a desire to create something suitable for Hallowe’en, probably something witchy! That’s a very tiny seed, and there were other disadvantages, such as lack of technical know-how.
I am taken by the design of a quilt I have seen in a book, and decide to use it, but with colours more appropriate to the autumn season. The fabrics I choose are dark greys which reflect cobblestones, misty, smokey greys, oranges for pumpkins and for the pomegranates with which according to ancient story, the Goddess Persephone feeds the souls in the Underworld. She offers them the seeds of new life. (2) There is deep blood red for women's live-giving Blood and the juice of the pomegranates, and shades of purple, prolific amongst the flowers of herbs used by the wise women healers, the witches. There are images of the harvest, baskets for gathering the abundant vegetables and fruits, particularly apples. We all know the connection apples have with witches from the fairy-tales told to us as children!

The fabrics themselves start to tell the story of the witches by their colour and designs. The word witch means wise woman, one who had inherited from the elder mothers the power of healing and to assist at the birth of new life, having learnt ways of lessening the pain and danger through her knowledge of herbs and psychic energies. They were priestesses delivering the sacraments from the Great Mother Earth, aged holders of an ancient wisdom.

Through the official witch-hunts of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries direct lineage, the umbilical cord to the ancient wisdom was systematically cut. Nevertheless as I approach my fiftieth birthday, I am willing to admit as well as hope that age brings wisdom. One patch of fabric I feel particularly attracted to has a butterfly etched onto a button. The butterfly has long been symbol of transformation and rebirth, symbol from antiquity of the Ultimate Mystery of the life-giving Goddess. On the brink of the wisdom of cronehood, I am amazed to think how long it has taken me to question the masculinity of the godhead, to find other stories, even to be able to hear these stories. Knowing divine attributes as feminine not only sits much more comfortably, it has a certain logical rationality when I look at woman as primogenatrix — she who gives birth. (3)
I discover that the basic block I must use is called the waterwheel. It seems very appropriate, since I had read that many suspected witches were 'ducked' in village ponds in order to ascertain their guilt or innocence. If the accused woman died after the prolonged minutes under water it proved her innocence; if she survived, she was definitely using her evil powers as a witch, proving herself guilty and would subsequently be hanged or burned alive. It was considered heresy not to believe in witchcraft. I was never told this part of the story in history classes. A feeling of deep pain and grief comes up. These women are my sisters, my mothers. It could have been me.

Although the symbolism of the waterwheel quickens my desire to continue, I am in the dark about its method of construction. I don't know how to find the basic block which repeats, or how to piece them together to make the tonal values work the way they do in the design I have seen. With some scant advice from my patchwork group I start out 'stripping' the tonally light and dark fabrics. (4) After a time it becomes difficult to make the distinction. The oranges and purples are tonally light in comparison to the reds and blacks, but when placed against the misty greys they become 'darks'. I realize how much I am working in the dark and decide to go with the urge to use these ambivalent colours in both value categories.

Working in the dark, having taken the risk with one of the main features of good quilt design — contrasting tonal values — I decide that I have no option but to enjoy the unpredictability of the outcome, to court the Mystery of creation! It does feel a little uncomfortable, even disappointing when I realize that I will be most unlikely to be able to recreate the image in the book which had inspired me.

The feeling of sadness and a sense of mourning become more evident as I place some of the blocks together on the floor. The distinction of light and dark is hardly evident. Randomness is. Contrasts usually provide the necessary clues for the beholder
to read the design in a way which facilitates interpretation. I comfort myself with the thought that maybe there is something else to be seen in and through the quilt which is coming into being.

Hecate steps forward at this point. She is the dark crone of the crossroads, keeper of the Underworld, caricatured and maligned by the priests of the Church and come down to us through the tellers of fairytale as the toothless and wicked old hag. (5) In the lore of old, Hecate the dark Goddess is midwife. She assists the birth of the new. At the end of each twenty-eight day cycle of the moon Hecate the crone, the wise old woman, gives rise to the sliver of the new moon, born as it is out of the fullness of the previous night’s full dark. (6)

I need her help as I start to feel failure. I feel distressed, wondering if I will ever bring some creation out of my inability to make the pattern work as I expect.

Then I remember that in the dark there is the seed of light. Queen of the Underworld, Hecate is priestess, whose sacramental power is to draw down in the dark the magical essence for transformation. In the myths of old she sits at the crossroads, the archetypal place of choice and the pivotal point of change, offering guidance in the choices available (which are rarely black and white — usually every subtle shade of grey).

As I piece the blocks together almost in a trance, a new energy returns. I realize that I am in the midst of creating a memorial of honour, a cloak of glory to Hecate and to the witches. Technical merit stands second to the memories this quilt evokes — dark, sorrowful, painful — and the new story it tells of the wise women whose crime was their connectedness to the cycles of Earth, and their knowledge of the healing arts.

The quilt in the book which I had wanted to imitate formed a rectangle, but my quilt needs to be of more sacred proportions, a triangle. As ancient symbol the inverted triangle imitates women’s pubic region, the gateway for and to Life. This is the
perfect shape to pull around the shoulders as a cloak. Using my own organic and natural rhythms in construction, making it scrap-like, almost rag-like to look at, it takes on its own life. I decide it will be displayed hanging over a broomstick.

I remember a friend, an artist who in her adult years, in the midst of raising her own family, discovered her aboriginality. The knowledge of her heritage having been hidden from her for most of her life, she set about making cloaks for the line of mothers before her. She used possum skins and government issue blankets, stitching her symbols into them. Perhaps, like me, she wanted to offer protection and comfort to the old, wise women in her family who in their bid to protect her had kept secret the origins of her birth, as well as to honour their memory for herself and her children.

When I place the rich, pumpkin-gold border bejewelled with fabrics symbolic of the season and witches along the top edge of Hecate’s cloak another image is evoked, that of the vestments worn by the priests. As I think about its glaring contrast to the rest of the fabrics in the cloak, I feel fear. Certainly fear would have been ever-present amongst women during the times of the witch-hunts. It would have driven one from the other.

Another memory returns from convent days of the priest donned in richly embroidered, betassled robes in which he performed the sacred liturgy. For the daily ritual the robes were set out by the sister sacristan. I had longed to have the privilege and honour of laying out these special garments, as the squire might set out the armour for his knight. The priest had received power bestowed from above, from another world. My cloak for Hecate honours a different exercise of power which values attributes closer to home for most women: those of sharing, support, giving, caring, listening, touching, grieving — life-giving miracles performed through the agency of our bodies in daily ritual, no matter the garments we wear.
In most traditional cultures women have been the mediators between the human and the divine. With the cloak to Hecate, I am reclaiming my priesthood. On the back of the cloak I stitch the insignia of the *ouroboros*, the snake circling back on itself, renewing the cycle of life. Around the outer hem of the cloak I quilt pentacles, long a symbol of protection and healing, the sign of the underground Goddess for the Celts. It is sometimes called Solomon’s Seal, and I sew it magically in one continuous movement, the way I now sign the first letter of my name, in trust that the residue of fear in psyche and cell from those times will cause me no harm. (7)
Notes for Chapter 1

1. SAMHAIN is not pronounced phonetically, but rather as ‘sow’ (as in ‘cow’) – en.

2. There is a particularly empowering telling of the myth, imagined in the context of a period before the classical, that is in pre-Hellenic and patriarchal Greece, in Charlene Spretnak’s Lost Goddesses of Early Greece.

3. Monica Sjoo has done a wonderful painting (reproduced in her book The Great Cosmic Mother) of a woman giving birth. In the 1970s she was taken to court for blasphemy because the title of the image was ‘God Giving Birth’. The first chapter of her book, ‘The First Sex: in the beginning we were all created female’, draws on the biological fact that all human foetuses begin life on earth as female. Irene Coates in The Seed Bearers (as does Rachel Pollack in The Body of the Goddess), points out that the sex differentiation to male, if it happens, occurs after six weeks of gestation.

4. Blocks are often cut from long strips formed by sewing together a strip of light and a strip of dark fabric.

5. Both the words ‘wicked’ and ‘hag’ have gone half circle into reverse, away from their original meanings, respectively ‘magical’ and ‘holy’; although I notice that amongst teenagers ‘wicked’ seems to be currently used as a compliment.

6. The phases of the moon are associated with the three stages of a woman’s life cycle: of being virgin, mother, and post menopausal elder and wisewoman. They correspond to the crescent, the full light moon, and the full dark moon. They are not limited to a literal interpretation of the life cycle, and can be felt at all stages of life in the metaphorical sense.

7. It is recorded that over one hundred thousand people, the majority of whom were women, were burned alive for clinging to their pagan ways, as the result of a campaign of terror instituted by the Catholic Church’s Inquisition, which took place over a three hundred year period in Europe and the British Isles. Estimates put the figure into the millions. British laws against the practice of witchcraft were only revoked four decades ago. Many books on Women’s Spirituality refer to these centuries as ‘The Burning Times’. An excellent summary and analysis is to be found in the Appendix to Starhawk’s Dreaming the Dark.

Barbara Walker is worth referring to in order to trace the symbolism of the pentacle. (1983:782). The Pythagoreans held it as the birth letter giving it the meaning of ‘life’ or ‘health’. An apple cut horizontally reveals the seeds protected and hidden inside the pentacle shape.
(This) is the last moment of gestation, the time in the womb that’s about to end in birth, the nothingness that becomes the universe.

Diane Stein, The Women’s Spirituality Book
ON THIS DAY the balance, weighted to the fullness of dark, is tipped towards the coming light. It is the first of the four festivals which celebrate the light half of the Wheel as it turns. There is a sense of relief, hope and potential as we realize that the daylight hours will steadily grow longer, until at midsummer’s day the balance tips again into darkness. There may be preference, but there is no escape from either aspect of the great Wheel of the Year. Dark and light are each recognized for their unique value, and their interdependence.

Although the sun still hangs low in the sky at this time of year the birth of the Sun Child is celebrated. It is an ancient tradition which Christians tapped into by celebrating the birth of Jesus on this day. Stories from this central motif are found in all the old mythologies, from Egypt to Sumer to the Celts. (1)

It is easy to see how these stories arose out of the ancestors’ connection with the land. As agriculturalists and pastoralists, the birth of new life with the coming of the light and warmth was essential to continuance of the tribe. The change brought security - salvation - a word etymologically sourced in the Latin word meaning safety. Their need for redemption was evoked by and seen to be taking place on the world stage, in the midgard, not in the heavens of or at some future time. Prompted by the drop in food supplies brought about by drought or the heavy snows on the ground, the need was felt as immanent. It came from and
developed as a perception that all life as sacred, with no separation of body from spirit, the functional from the spiritual.

The berries hang red and orange on the bushes and the bare trees remind us of our roots in distant lands. Yule is a time for intense, almost serious celebration. At this point on the cycle the forces of death and rebirth meet. It is a birth, impelling concentration in each moment to bring forth the new life which has been gestating in dreams, held in the darkness, womb-like. It may come unexpectedly, but when it comes it is time to take part in its process, to know ourselves as inherently divine, both participants in and creators of the numinous.

At our ritual for the Solstice we learn a new dance. We must trust in our ‘unknowing’ and enter into the dance in the spirit of renewal. We dance our connectedness at the Still Point in the centre, circling out to slow and gentle movement around the Still Point between breaths, birthing our new awareness. We feel ourselves in the fecund void, at one with the dark, and know our shadows follow us as we sway gently in harmony with the unfolding light. We are quite literally dancing on the belly of Great Mother Earth, easing her contractions, waiting for the crowning, rejoicing in the birthing of creation.

**Inner Sanctum**

Calling into the local haberdashery shop one winter day, I happened to see some cotton dress fabric which appealed to me — not that I had made a dress for ages! Printed on the stony coloured background were swirls of spirals. Here was the fabric and the inspiration which had eluded me for making a quilt celebrating the transformative potential of the dark. (2)

I decide my quilt is to evoke both birth and death, light and dark, the union of opposites from which comes new hope and the newborn child. I want to recreate in cloth a sense of what our forebears must have felt on this day as they ritually watched the first rays of the frail solstice sun entering into the underground chamber of the huge mound built from stone and rock on the
ancient plains at Newgrange in Ireland. They would have watched in awe and wonder as, through a carefully placed chink between the great stones of the roof, the dawn rays of the sun fell lightly onto a triple spiral carved on the rock wall of the inner room.

The womb is dark, the soil is dark, and there is the dark night of the soul. I am beginning to feel, to get an inkling of what the ancestors knew — that waiting in the darkness is enormous potential. In the dark is the ovum of light which will split, expand and grow. Ancient peoples, inhabitants of these lands prior to the Celts, had built this mound to represent in honour the life-giving force issuing from the womb of Great Mother Earth, celebrated on this day of turning out of the dark. Revisiting this spirit surely I can build a quilt!

Light piercing rock surely is the light which only darkness can bring. On a trip into one of the caves at Jenolan the guide turned off the electric lighting, giving visitors the chance to experience what she called ‘natural cave light’. Her use of the word light bemused me. I couldn’t see it. Yet very much in my body now, in the full dark I’m sure I feel something akin to it, the essence of the Mystery I am trying to create in my Winter Solstice quilt.

This quilt has to start in the centre, in the inner sanctum, the holy of holies. It starts as an idea, a concept it is often called, which has come to mean originating in the mind only. The word concept has a clinical, logical attachment of meaning. But concept is as much a bodily happening, if one considers the association of the word. Conception happens through engaging in wonder with the Mystery in sacred space. And it is definitely physical, a physical movement towards birth, becoming visible through the quilts and meta-physically, spiritually realized in the inner sanctum of imagination.

Was it in a recognition and a calling forth of their own potential that the ancestors ventured into the darkness of caves to seek advice from the oracle, the diviner, the seer — she who could see
through the dark? This quilt embodies a longing to trust those regular and cyclical periods of darkness, knowing that it is the Great Mother of the inner landscapes who is giving birth to me in the outer world, spiralling in and out in the process of nurturing, growth, death and decay into rebirth, which is reflected in the process of the greater universe, and paints the bigger picture.

Creating my own sacred site, I start by cutting the triple spiral from the dress fabric. I attach it to a foundation piece, and start stripping around it to form a generative triangle, symbol of woman’s pubic area. Working in the dark, with no pre-drawn design, I use bits and pieces of discarded experiments in crazy patching to build up a stone structure. The scraps of blood red remind me of the way the ancestors painted the openings to caves an ochre colour. The significance of this cannot be denied. To honour the Mother, ritual rebirthings must have been practised for all time. (3)

The central panel completed, I look for ways to put borders around it. One of the fabrics I am using (creating a continuity with the last quilt) is the grey cobblestone which chameleon-like takes on the quality of snake skin. Cutting freely into the fabric I find the coiling movements of a snake. Snakes were sacred to the Goddess for many reasons, one being their closeness to the earth, another the shedding of their skins, as well as their habit of emerging from Her underground womb. They were symbols of renewing life. More snakes show up before I am finished.

The design of this quilt fascinates me, especially as an expression of my own spiritual meanderings. Although there is an obvious focal point, it does not seem to dominate — that is, take over. As in a garden, there are many different aspects which hold attention separately many different flowers to see and smell. And they all contribute to and participate in the overall impression of richness and beauty.
As I quilt the layers together, I feel that I am bringing together the many different shapes and features of the design, so very disparate yet forming a whole picture. I am creating a unity in diversity. There is separateness within an overall unity—difficult to define, better felt at the gut level! Conceiving and growing this quilt has been a magical experience. It really does take on a life of its own, and seems to demand its own private interaction with the viewer.

The Yule quilt holds a secret, evident only when it is held up to the light. In imitation of the Newgrange tomb, there is a tiny triangular chink cut through all layers to let the re-turning light shine through. (4)
Notes for Chapter 2

1. Mythologies which tell the story of the death and birth of the Sun God are set in the context of the Wheel of the Year. There is an excellent summary of this motif in Starhawk's *Spiral Dance*, tenth anniversary edition (1989:218). In *Truth or Dare* she brings the significance of the Sumerian account, the earliest surviving account of a story with this motif, into present times, weaving through the re-telling of the ancient text an evaluation of the nature of power in our cultural context.

2. My fascination for the spiral as ancient symbol led me to discover how widely represented it is in the ancient cultures of Europe and the Middle East. They are carved into entrance rocks at the megalithic tomb at Newgrange. In spite of these wonderful underground ‘tombs’ being as ancient as the pyramid tombs of the Pharaohs I had not heard of them until recently. Rather than as the burial chambers of temporal rulers, they were more likely (as was Stonehenge) to have been built to honour the birth and death mysteries of the Great Mother, observed and made manifest in the changing seasons and recorded in the heavens by the movement of sun, moon and stars.

3. Caves for the ancients, were the natural places to make the link with the Underworld, to seek healing and rebirth. As at Delphi and Eleusis in ancient Greece, they were known as the *omphalos*, the navel of the world, a place to reconnect the umbilical cord and to experience the Mysteries.

4. As a woman following the spiritual path of my ancestors who lived in harmony with the worlds — above, below and between — I have a burning ambition to visit the sites they considered sacred and to learn more about why they were held sacred. Many of them now have Christian monuments built over them, such as Chartres Cathedral in France. Jean Shinoda Bolen's book *Crossing to Avalon* is a fascinating account of her experience in making pilgrimage to some of these sacred sites.
IMBOLC

The black-winged night laid a silver egg (the moon) in the womb of darkness, in the dark waters. The divine one resided in that egg during a whole year. Then She by herself alone divided into two halves and out of these halves She formed heaven and earth...

Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, The Great Cosmic Mother
THE SECOND OF THE Crossquarter Days, Imbolc, opens wider the chink through which the light comes. It assures us that light is returning, that the barren winter months are passing. Life in the womb is quickening. From the day of the Winter Solstice the sun has been rising earlier in the day and setting later, though it is not yet really noticeable. The days become only slightly warmer as the earth tilts slowly towards her embrace with the sun.

The pale and tentative wattles which showed their face at Solstice are now joined by the big bold cootamundras, golden boughs bursting into bloom and weighted with scent. Indistinguishable from their sisters until now, the male casuarina trees become evident, almost eagerly, by the browning of their foliage. Heavy with seed, they seem to be waiting less than patiently to burst into the dance of life.

Alluring perfumes from magnolia trees and daphne bushes join violet and narcissus in alerting us to the return of Demeter’s daughter, Persephone. She has been sheltering in the Underworld during the cold dark winter moons. She is the Goddess returning as the maiden, the Virgin, who brings with her the stirring life force. She picks a narcissus as she cautiously makes her way into the light, taking time to pause and adjust to the gentle light. (1)

At Imbolc the Goddess Brigid, also known as Bride, is encouraged to come forward in her white veil, bringing the fulfilment of the
promise made in the depths of winter for renewed life. She is surrounded by and crowned with candles. Of the four elements which unite to make manifest the energies of life, fire is the one associated with Brigid, the virginal Celtic Goddess Christianised as St. Brigid, whose stories relate the mystery of the alchemy of transformation. Her energies are often symbolized by the melding together of metals in the fire, forged into a new strength, more beautiful and stronger.

Fire is the focus of this festival, and from earliest times there has been an eternal flame at the shrine of Brigid, a flame kept alight in honour of life not war. (2) Signs of transformation are particularly evident in nature at this time of year, although in the Australian bush fire sometimes comes unexpectedly. Death often follows in its path, and then seed-pods, scorched in the fire, burst to spread their seeds to continue the dance of life. The indigenous peoples of this land have lived with the fire stick, knowing well both its potential for destruction and regeneration.

Brigid's Banner

At the time this quilt was made, the 'challenge' chosen by my patchwork group — every year we do something as a group — was to make strip formations of patchwork in a round robin. Each woman provides a starter strip and some simple instructions for design or colour if she wishes, or the outcome can be a complete surprise. The strip is rotated amongst the members of the group to be added to as each person sees fit. The owner does not see the finished design until everyone in the group has added a pieced strip. The anticipation can only be imagined.

For me it is a living learning process, like being thrown into the deep end. I feel vulnerable amongst all these experienced and accomplished quilters. However, I manage to see it as an opportunity to teach myself something. So with the help of books, I start into some seminole patchwork. (3) Using a number of plain yellow fabrics, I find myself trying to recreate the boughs of wattle which I could see in their various hues of yellow dotted
throughout the bush below the house. It doesn’t fit with the ‘strippy’ I am adding to that week so I put it aside and wait for inspiration.

At our ritual for Imbolc we welcome the waxing light and delight in the possibilities which new growth brings, opening to the insight and inspiration, the creative energies. Later I start to form blocks of simple four patch in colours which remind me of fire. Staring into the winter fire I see yellows, greys and reds. I join the four patch blocks of colour to make some fire strips.

I anticipate that for this time of the Wheel, through the ritual of quilting I am exploring the Celtic traditions associated with transformative energies, with inspiration. The quilt I am in the process of creating still has not made itself manifest to me. I seem to be creating it very piecemeal, like a cell dividing which divides again.

The division started at the time of making the quilt for the Winter Solstice. What is left from this quilt is a large piece of patchwork, a type of Celtic knot made by more conventional processes, with the curious name given in the book in which I found it of the California Twist. Nevertheless with a little transformation through intention, its appropriateness for the Brigid quilt both takes me by surprise and urges me on. The intertwining black and silver fabrics remind me of the metals transformed in the fire, forging the new. The overall shape gives the impression of a casement window through which the virginal light of early morning can be seen. Imbolc is a time for throwing open windows letting fresh air into the house.

In making the casement window I remember liking the rhythmic process of cutting the fabrics to precise specifications, piecing the base blocks, then joining them together — and the thrill of seeing the whole image emerge. And I am now finding that the organic process I am involved in encourages me. The latest myth from the quantum physicists tells us that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that each of the parts contains the
whole. It is a very inspiring story and one which resonates deeply with my own intuitive understanding. In my cupboard I discover more parts — earlier experimental pieces of patchwork. (3)

Pieces set aside from earlier learning processes, they too have been waiting their time of inclusion in the whole, their transformation. They were created when I was practising a technique I had been inspired to try after seeing a quilt in a show. A more recent version of the crazy patch, the technique involves placing three or four layers of fabric on top of each other and cutting through all layers without using a ruler— cutting freely, without any guidelines of measurement. One strip from each layer is taken and joined to form another swatch of fabric. The cutting can be done as many times as desired, the resultant piecing bringing up seemingly random patterns, consistent with the nature of the process.

I had recently created some swatches using this technique from fabrics related in tone and colour. The way I have pieced the random strips calls up the image of blocks of stone put down in layers, reminiscent of the old dry stone walls which crisscross the British Isles — an image reminiscent of Brigid’s homeland. I continue to cut into the swatches to make more stone walls which, by serendipity, have become another part of the Candlemas quilt. The swatches have a feel of hard ancient stone overlaid with the growth of soft moss. I notice how the use of this technique evokes a feeling of freedom and the excitement of anticipation at what might emerge.

The construction of the various elements also becomes layer-like. The shape becomes vertical and there is movement between the worlds of heaven, the mid-world and the underworld, which is represented by the soft velvet black strip at the bottom of the quilt. The formation of these variously created components is taking on the likeness of a banner. It is a banner to the Celtic Goddess, with a strong flavour of Aboriginal colours at the bottom.
In the horizontal layering of the worlds I find a place for the other experimental strip of seminole. Placed in the whole design, not only is it wattle but also the candle flames, burning to encourage Brigid to bring the light. In the top right hand corner of the quilt a nine patch represents the energies of the East. Across the four corners of the globe early peoples in touch with the frailty of life must have looked with hope to the East, knowing that in the gentle dawn light the blessing of renewal was upon them. The calling of the four directions in ritual brings sacred presence and reminds us of our union with the Mystery and the matter of creation, symbolized by the elements of air, fire, water and earth. (5)
Notes for Chapter 3

1. There are many stories of the loss of Persephone into the Underworld, including the Hellenic and patriarchal version which is probably best known, recounting her abduction and rape by Hades. I prefer to think she would have been well received and protected by her grandmother Hecate, Goddess and Queen of the Underworld. (She who personified Persephone’s own innate shrewdness and wisdom). As mentioned earlier, Charlene Spretnak re-tells the story in *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece* in pre-Hellenic mode. Christine Downing is one of the many writers who explore various interpretations of the myth as psychological seasons of the soul, in *Saga: Best New Writings on Mythology*.

2. Brigid’s flame was extinguished early in the thirteenth century by a Bishop of the Church who wished to superimpose the Christian faith on the indigenous peoples of Ireland. In 1993, her flame was rekindled in Kildare, charcoal from which was carried aboard an airplane in a handwarmer to the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. (Noirin Ni Riain, *Celtic Soul*, 1996, Earth Music Productions).

3. Seminole is a type of patchwork based on measured strips joined and cut at angles to develop a diamond-shaped design. It is quite geometric and precise. I deliberately interrupted the pattern by adding an extraneous tone of yellow now and then.

4. The word myth, like many others, has become quite eroded. I am reclaiming its original meaning here, without any intention to belittle theorists of scientific knowledge. On the contrary, much of the new scientific thinking from physicists and cosmologists has been evolving a spiritual worldview which is unfolding at the same time as the resurgence in the practice and understanding of women’s spirituality. The empirical scientific path now supports earlier and current intuitively held beliefs about the creative relationship between ourselves, the earth and the universe.

There are many ways to talk about myth. I like Starhawk’s rendition in the *Spiral Dance*: ‘Myth is the telling of the collective story about what really happens in the spiritual counterpart of the physical world. When we enter into a myth, through ritual, then similar processes unfold in us.’ (1989:218)

5. In our festival and moon rituals, the four directions are called moving anti-clockwise, as the inspiration of air in the East, the passion of fire in the North, the waters of deep feeling in the West, and the physicality of earth in the South. They take their place like four sentinels at the corners of Brigid’s banner.
What is potential takes root, sends up shoots, and puts forth leaves. The spirit of the Sun enters into the seeds of spring. Call the Seed Daughter of the Sun, for she will grow to ripen, swell and give birth to herself. Call the Seed Son of the Sun, for he will rise and spill himself out and fall again. Or call the Seed the child of Balance, for in it meet all opposites. Darkness and light, fire and water, earth and air, day and night are necessary for its growth.

_Starhawk, The Spiral Dance_
There is a spring in the step by now. There are signs everywhere that the Wheel is turning to bring renewed life. From this day onwards the daylight hours will outweigh the hours of dark until six months later, when at the Autumn Equinox the scales tip again in favour of the dark.

The cosmic egg is waiting in the void in company with the seed of light. In nature each creature is drawn to its opposite by desire to unite, to remember the oneness experienced in creative acts, be it making art, making love, or the myriad other acts of creation we engage in daily. The potential of oneness is felt at Eostar, Easter. In the southern parts of the globe, the signs in nature of buds on bare trees and bronze and burgundy-tipped gum trees are starting to be obvious early in September.

The rhythm and tone for this festival are set by balance and harmony. Seeds planted in the darkness establish their root and stem structures. Reaching down into the nurturing dark soil they take firm hold in the underworld. They start to push and stretch into the heavens and to unfurl their light-gathering leaves. Without this balancing act, these simultaneous movements of desire towards dark and light, the potential of the seed would remain unknown.

By spring the coming light is not a faint glimmer, but evident in the fullness of its potential. The incandescent glow is reflected now by the abundance of the many varieties of wattle blooms,
golden and heavy on the boughs. Even after the long winter grasses are rarely a verdant green, but dry and hay-like, hoping for just another spot of rain to sustain growth through the hot months ahead. The earth herself seems to be holding the opposites.

Is it any wonder that early in creation story telling and in the symbols used to convey the Mystery, the egg has been held as a sacred symbol? Like wheat, it can be eaten for nourishment and it mysteriously contains within it the seed to renew life in the next turn of the Wheel. Creation stories are made to ponder at this time of the year. Tightly woven into the cultural fabric of folklore are myths founded in a mystical understanding of renewal through death of the seed. (1)

Downunder in the southern part of the globe, we need to save some chocolate Eostar eggs for September, or go back to the traditional European way of dyeing hens’ eggs, most often red, for the life-renewing Blood of the Mother.

**Embracing the Opposites**

This small quilt is one of the first I made. It was started during the season of Spring Equinox at a class on the block known as the log cabin. In my innocence and naivety about patchwork quilting generally, I fronted up with my samples of curtain fabric and without a scrap of an idea in my head! The experience of my teacher combined with her desire to make it work started me down a track of exciting discovery. From this quilt it could be said that the inner creative seed of patchwork and quilting swelled and ripened (which for me sounds much more inspiring than talking about ‘catching the bug’ or ‘becoming hooked’).

Though we do not know that these motley fabrics will ultimately come alive as the meeting of opposites in the Eostar quilt, Sue sees the potential in them. The fabrics seem to hold the possibility of balance, waiting for the distinction of contrast for identity. I am not able to recognize these distinctions as the tonal values of light and dark as this contrast is not obvious enough for me. Is it
simply that when we are feeling balanced the contrasts are not so obvious, though at other times they have the potential to cause anguish or conflict? The irony is that they are always there.

Thinking of sunlight and in need of more contrasting tones (I literally do not have enough of the darker swatches), I decide to introduce some oranges, reds, maroons and continue to spiral around the pale yellow central squares. I love watching the blocks literally unfold, open out like a rose or flower of some kind, always full of surprise. I make four such blocks and with twelve other blocks completed, decide it is time to give form to the creation.

In retrospect the whole process brought up memories of my pregnancy: the news a little bewildering at first, then excitement starts to take hold. This was followed by a period of discomfort and the urgency to feed the growing life within felt as uncontrollable ravenous hunger! Then an inner strength took root at the realization and wonder of the new life I was supporting, coupled with a gnawing uncertainty as to the outcome. Feeling apprehensive towards the end, I knew that the physical discomfort I was experiencing would most likely increase. From a popular point of view, birth is rarely referred to as a wonder of the numinous unfolding, as deeply creative and spiritual. Yet in the process, it is often personally witnessed as the most fundamental of spiritual experiences.

At the time of making the quilt for Spring Equinox my research is still quite fresh. I am just starting out on my journey of discovery into the relationship between women’s spirituality, creativity and sense of personal power with enthusiasm and determination. And I am still unsure about definitions for these terms. I continue to trust that it will become clear, the distinctions will show intuitively and experientially.

In looking again at the blocks, I notice the varying intensities of greens and think about trees. With the promise of spring comes the return not only of the universal signifier, light, but of green to trees which are not native to this land, but imported with Celtic
forbears and by later newcomers to the land. In Australia in our times there is opportunity to embrace the opposites, to build community with the strength of individuality, and thereby to bring forth the potential of harmony in abundance available to us through embracing the diversity.

At the season of Eostar I reflect that this little quilt seems to be about holding the balance between instinctual nature and societal needs, between the need to be authentically expressive, truly creators of our own lives, and to live in co-operation with others as creators of the world, to be responsible to the larger picture as well as that in our own backyard. Maybe I had come across the foundation, born in my experience as woman and mother, of my spirituality: to hold the opposites.

In completing the Eostar quilt the main creative quandary is my strange reluctance to join the blocks into a final and rigid format: whether to stitch them in, or keep them separate and let them be placed by the individual beholder as s/he saw fit! Surely in the naming of change, there is also the naming of constancy, just as in the seemingly repetitive movement of the spiralling circle there is constancy and change. The many ways in which the sixteen different blocks, each with its own variation of tone and colour, could be put together to form a unity both gives rise to these thoughts and proffers a solution — an order out of chaos.

Each of the blocks has been individually pieced from the fragments of fabrics. There was randomness in the choice of strips as I spiralled around the pale yellow squares, which were themselves a constancy, as was the light/dark contrast in each block. More than this, each block has taken on a certain quality arising out of the random stripping: some are darker and bolder than others, more shadowed, some brighter, some more muted or understated. In the placement of the blocks their qualities become somehow more and less obvious, which in turn affects the overall impact of the quilt. It makes me think how important environment is, the need of context to a growing understanding, of relationship to compassion. I am beginning to realize that there
are layers and layers of imagery which both form and reflect a sense of Self, a sense of our inner, personal power. (2)

In the end the decision about the final formation simply comes from the idea I want to represent: the growing light, burgeoning vegetation. As I play with the placement of the blocks, the sun bursts forth as a plus sign. Dare I call it one of the oldest of humankind’s abstractions? It not only means increment, but the union of opposites, the yoni giving a place of entry to the lingam, the lingam entering the space of the yoni, both held in balance for a sacred moment. (3)

I experience paradox in the notions of balance and harmony, which like the Great Mystery defies logical, rational development. It buzzes around me as I place the blocks in the many different formations which show up. It seems like a creation game which could go on going on forever, spiralling like a wheel: to reach one’s potential is to be able to make authentic choices and requires the union of response-ability (the ability to respond appropriately), and Self-authoring (feeling oneself as having agency in the matter). Simple and structured though it is, this quilt contains more than the design element. It requires from me a mystical way of understanding.

In quilting the three layers together I become Spider Woman, She who spins the yarn, weaves it into a connected whole then cuts the threads to set the creation free. For some of the indigenous peoples of central America, Spider Woman is the Life Weaver, She who decides Fate on the larger Wheel — of Life and Fortune. (4) I decide in quilting to imitate the way a spider spins her web, finding the information by serendipity in a book my son is reading.

Some technical difficulties occur in trying to transpose the process of web-making between two branches across thin air, to stitching across ridges of cloth. As I struggle with the quilting I think about the fragility of the web image I am stitching onto the quilt, stretching across the seemingly eternal presence of the great
fireball. The contrast between these two images of strength and power becomes less, swings into balance, when considered in the entirety of creation, that is, in the context of relationship. The threads of quilting which connect the three layers together remind me of the strength and support webs of relationship provide on a daily basis, and I remember that the sun is using up energy and will one day burn out.

Unknown to me at the time, this little quilt was the creative seed, the egg from which other quilts would become manifest. I don’t mean that I repeated the log cabin block in different ways. It was more like a spark taking fire, fuelled by the dance with the creative urge from which form takes shape. There is a joyful irony about this quilt: made and designed in and for the season when we draw the curtains aside to let in the growing warmth of the sun after the cold winter months, the top is made almost entirely from samples of curtain fabric.
Notes for Chapter 4

1 Renditions of creation stories from the perspective of a feminine cosmology can be found in Sjoow and Mor, The Great Cosmic Mother (1987:55), and Starhawk, The Spiral Dance (1989:31). Other extant myths which relate to the cyclic falling of the seed in the cause of life's renewal have been coopted to reinforce the patriarchal system, though some remnants of the redemptive role of woman are evident in the early Sumerian texts, translated and analysed by Wolkstein and Kramer, as the story of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth.

2 I sometimes write the word self using a capital S. When I do this I am inviting an image of wholeness, integrity, health. Jean Shinoda Bolen says that 'The Self is whatever we experience that is greater than our small selves through which we know that there is something meaningful to our existence.' (1994:257)

3 The terminology I use here is the ancient Hindu highest signification for the life principle: male and female genitalia in conjunction. It is interesting to note also that the Jungian archtypal image or symbol for 'individuation', the coming into our own authentic power, is the mandala of a circle within a square.

4 In the Greek tradition, She is called Arachne, from which is taken the biological name for the spider group. The spider was an obvious animal totem for Athena, who was Fate Weaver, the Goddess of creative pursuits recognized as happening within the home, thereby based in functionality. The economy of the home (the word economy as used today has lost its connection with the original domestic meaning), was based on such skills as spinning, weaving and pottery.

Athena was the original Mother of Invention as Athena Parthenia, She Who Comes from Herself, before she became relegated with the onset of the classical era to weaving men's fates in the theatre of battle. Her disempowerment happened in a classical fashion told in the epic tale of Aeschylus known as the Oresteia. It was told that, not only denied birth from the mother, having been born from the brow of her father Zeus, Athena also cast the deciding vote against the conviction of Orestes, who had avenged the murder of his father Agamemnon by killing his mother, Clytemnestra. The rationale which Athena gave for her decision was that matricide was not a crime, since it was from the father that life was given. Irene Coates' book, The Seed Bearers, is an excellent account of the basis for and subsequent devaluation of the life-giving power, which for millennia of prehistory had been attributed to the force of the Divine Feminine.
So all forms repeat, return,
Rebirth, dissolve, reflect forever,
Down the passages of space and time,
Each birth the same, yet ever new,
Universe blooming into unimagined worlds
That yet shall be.

Shekinah, in Ffiona Morgan's, *Daughters of the Moon* Tarot
BELTANE

October 31

There is a crack in the void — the cosmic egg is entwined in the love embrace with the serpent and will soon be ready to split from itself, to take form. Held in the balance at Eostar the life force is unstoppable now, tumbling headlong into the dance of courtship with the sun’s renewing energy.

In the northern hemisphere at this time of year there is an opening between the worlds of the living and dead, the possibility of movement across boundaries at the celebration of Samhain, or Hallowe’en, when the veil between the worlds is thinnest. In the southern hemisphere there is an opening and an envelopment. The seduction of summer’s warmth calls for the fulfilment of a different need. It is the season of seeking — with lustful love, with the passion which seizes and won’t let go, acting spontaneously and adequately at the same time — in communion.

Rather than being compelled by force there is a surrendering to the power and the rightness of our own feelings, our gut feelings. It is time to forget the ordinary tasks of the daily grind and revel in the rising sun. There is an element of excitement, of risk taking in the air, of seeming contradictions — a death which is somehow a birth, a durable vulnerability which is somehow an unheroic strength.

In the season of growth for soul and seed each expansion, each step forward means contradicting the previous one and leaving something cherished behind. It means dying to our old notion of
who we are and taking on a new creation, which each time is fuller and richer and yet, as the Wheel turns, begins to seem too small and too restricting. (1)

The Horned God Cernunnos of the Celts, Lord of the Animals, of Death and Rebirth, is participant in the life force with the Lady of the Beasts. She calls to him from an alternative pathway, a way of gaining strength and power without violence and domination. He hears the call, for he too is the life cycle and in this Self-knowledge power is directed towards the service of life.

As the days grow visibly longer and where I live the winds blow stronger, he is the Lord of the Winds, Lord of the Dance, symbolizing the whirling energies that bind existence in eternal motion’ as Starhawk says. ‘He embodies movement and change,’ as men and women in the equivalent northern season have intertwined ribbons in dance around the standing Maypole, symbol of the phallus, knowing it is a dance which embodies the union of the opposites and thereby the continuance of life. (2)

The flame kindled for Brigid at the August festival of Candlesmas now combusts into a huge bonfire leaping high into the night’s darkness. Those who feel the passion leap even higher to avoid the scorches. In the northern hemisphere this is the eve of what came to be known as May Day, when the Maypole is erected in honour of the leaping Lord and of the desire he shares with the Goddess for fruitful union. It is the season of the fire of passion, the joy of the chase, of courtship and budding sexuality. It is a love celebration of ‘the life-giving fertility of the blooming planet when sweet desire weds wild delight.’ (3)

In casting my mind back to primary school days under the spiritual guidance of the good sisters, I remember that on May Day we all dressed in our white ‘first communion’ finery (symbolizing sexual purity) to honour Mary in procession. We carried her shoulder high on a litter, the virginal Mother of God, and dropped rose petals in her path from straw baskets entwined with fernery (I now know to be symbols of the life-giving womb).
as we sang ‘O Mary we crown thee with blossom today...’. The Virgin was crowned Queen of the May with substitute foliage, because as winter encroaches there is no blossom in May in Australia.

For us in the southern hemisphere the Maypole becomes the November pole, a rather cumbersome name substitute. It is the day of Beltane, of the ‘Novapole’. (4) My childhood celebration for the Virgin is transformed and enriched by the story of Great Mother Demeter’s daughter, the Kore or maiden Goddess (‘kore’ also means ‘sprout’) who is joyfully welcomed back from her time in the Underworld as spring flowers carpet the earth. In the bush garden, haikeas and callistemons, the bright red bottlebrush, invite the tiny honeyeaters and wattle birds to feed on their sweet pollens.

During the winter months I have seen the possums at evening in my vegetable patch searching for food. One particularly determined female has been coming to the bird feeder hanging on the porch to eat the seed. At Imbolc I noticed the slit of her vulva-like pouch had become distended and wobbles with the movement of young life feeding from within. By Beltane she is scampering through the trees with the baby firmly gripping her back.

Beltane Dances

Like some of the other quilts, this quilt seems to carry quite forcefully its own creative energies. The characteristic act of ‘splitting’ follows the embryo of an idea either literally, as between the two centre panels for the Yule and Imbolc quilts, or in the carry over into the next quilt of favoured fabrics. Sometimes it is in the blossoming of an idea for the next quilt out of the formation of the one in hand. Sometimes it happens out of sheer necessity and I feel the presence of the Mother of Invention.

The Beltane quilt was born out of all of the above and probably more invisible forces. Starhawk points out that what is true for physical conception and birth is also true for creative endeavours:
'any creative work that is truly alive is influenced by a thousand factors in its generation'. Beginning again as an experiment in technique it became a concept, an idea with a purpose set in a context. The context became broader, more demanding and ultimately more rewarding because it resulted in my achieving something I didn’t know I could do. Magic happens.

Following on from the Spring Equinox quilt, I am becoming quite fascinated with the image of the spider’s web. Not only are there ancient mythologies based in the web image woven across continents, we regularly hear the use of the term today in computer technology (world wide web). In the ancient art of numerology my birth number corresponds to the Spider Woman in the tarot deck I use. (5) It is no wonder that I feel attracted to the formation in patchwork known as the Spider Web.

In deciding to try the block using a freehand cutting approach, I keep in mind the intertwining ribbons around the Novapole, as well as the colours of the rainbow — the rainbow which comes after the rains and heralds a clear day. I start to pull out fabrics belonging to the different colour groups. The gradations of colour which form the rainbows seen in the sky as the rain clears, and in children’s story books start to interest me. It seems to be a practical way to learn about the colour wheel I have glanced at in art and patchwork textbooks.

I hold a quartz crystal up to the light and notice how the reds merge into the oranges, having received a touch of yellow from the other side. These yellows lean the other way to mix with the blues and all sorts of variations of green become possible. And as the blues move closer to the next red arch of the rainbow-beginning-again, the hues formed are the sacred purples and crimsons, symbols of the highest chakra which, when opened up, creates a direct link with the Divine. (6)

Again with the aim of recreating the image of the colourful ribbons flying around in the dance, the festival feel picks up a beat as I cut the fabric with wild abandon to create a starry night
sky! This part of the proceedings is suddenly brought to an end by simply running out of the background stars. But the need for more night sky is apparent in order to move further out into the macrocosm, to get the bigger picture. So I set to making a starry stary night from various fat-quarters which I had bought over the years because they had sent me a message I couldn’t ignore when I came across them. (7)

Different worlds again tend to show up horizontally in this quilt, as they had done in the quilt for Brigid’s Day. Along the bottom of the quilt I place a strip of leaves. They could be fossils representing the aeons of time, layers of bedrock which contain evidence of life forms on the planet present long before the human species. They could be the unfurling leaves of this Beltane, leaves which at the previous festival of Eostar were crumpled into tight buds on the trees.

With the flashing ribbons, the mating dance is well and truly under way in the midgard, under the arch of the heavenly lights coming out of the darkness. The orb in the centre like the leaves takes on layers of meaning. It is the waxing moon, which in Australia grows to fullness starting on the left and moving across to the right into full light. It is also the union of opposites, the yin-yang symbol of creative union.

Little did I know that after I had bound the edges of the Beltane quilt it would split again! I thought I had captured the life-giving sexual drive of Beltane. But it called for more creative energy which eventually became manifest as the two side panels giving this quilt the dimensions of the triptych, the form reminiscent of sacred icons. For me it has the feel of a sacred garment, the two side panels being the stole worn by the ancient priestess which hang either side of her body.

I set to create more space — outer space that is. Discarded pieced swatches from the rainbow challenge me to see something in them, to take on a new relationship to them. They want to be seen differently, not just as scraps to be thrown out. As I piece
around them they become self-organizing, and in interacting with them I start to change my perception so that out of a lack of equilibrium, a disharmony, new possibilities and new patterns can be seen. (8)

The quilt for Beltane has the effect of putting me into orbit and beyond into other galaxies, past supernovas and quarks, into the yawning chasm devoid of form or fullness. The fabric I choose to put on the back of the centre panel moves me instantly to the teeming microcosmic void and reminds me of the dance at cellular level. And I stand in wonder at the crossroads, in the position of being ‘in between stories’, as Thomas Berry puts it. His fellow cosmologist and physicist Brian Swimme says that ‘that which blossomed forth as cosmic egg 15 billion years ago now blossoms forth as oneself, as one’s family, as one’s community of living beings, as our blue planet, as our ocean of galaxy clusters. The same fecund source — then and now; the same numinous energy — then and now.’ (9)

Notes for Chapter 5

1 These ideas summarized and reiterated by John Rowan in The Horned God: Feminism and Men as Wounding and Healing, 1989, come from James Hillman, Jungian psychologist.

2 In The Spiral Dance, 1989, Starhawk has a wonderful chapter on the God, pp.107-121. In the tenth anniversary edition of 1989, she has expanded her commentary in the Notes (pp 230-235). She claims that ‘reclaiming and re-envisioning the ways power-from-within might reveal itself to us in male forms is an important task as we try to reshape culture.’

The title of the Beltane festival is a Celtic cognate of the ancient Sumerian vegetation gods, known in the Bible as *baalim*. These gods were the consorts of the Goddess and eventually evolved under Christian lore into Beelzebub, the generic name for the devil. In the cause of fertile harvest, the god was not only consort to the goddess, but also sacrificial offering. Barbara Walker’s *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* says that into the modern era his effigy was burned at midsummer to make the crops thrive (1983:84). The term ‘Novapole’ was suggested to me by Glenys Livingstone.

The Spider Woman (of the *Daughters of the Moon* tarot deck by Fionna Morgan) has similar attributes to the Greek’s Arachne mentioned in the previous chapter, indicating the universality of the image, symbol or archetype. Her legend lives with the Pueblo peoples of central America. As elder and crone, her significance and power is as the Life Weaver.

There are seven points on the body which correspond to chakra points, or locations of energy, which in turn correspond to the seven colours of the rainbow. I suspect that colour therapy, like numerology, is another esoteric artform undermined and undervalued by the mainstream medical model.

The fat-quarter is another patchwork term needing no explanation to patchworkers. It is a quarter metre of fabric cut as a square, and amounts to 25 centimetres square. When I first heard the term, I thought I was buying some sort of loin of lamb!

The ideas and theories of the new science have greatly interested me, especially as they indicate a changing and evolving spiritual worldview based on principles which overlap with the invisible and spiritual concepts of connectedness and interdependence, immanence and inclusiveness. These principles are recognized by Starhawk in *Dreaming the Dark* as the essence of a spirituality appropriate to the times in which we live. I find it fascinating that Margaret Wheatley has recognized the possibility of applying the concepts which are forming the theories of new science to the business world in her book, *Leadership and the New Science — Learning about Organizations from an Orderly Universe*.

The Sun Kinggrown embraces the Queen of Summer in the love that is
death because it is so complete that all dissolves into the single song of ecstasy
that moves the world.

Starhawk, The Spiral Dance
At midsummer the sun is high overhead. It is equivalent on the annual calendar to high noon. Falling somewhere between 20 and 23 December, it is the longest day of the year, the perfect opportunity for revelry and excess. It is the day to celebrate both the triumph of light and its capitulation to the oncoming dark.

The harvests have begun, but the season of plenty will gradually ease as the sun, born at Yule, starts to withdraw her favours. The earth in her orbit around the sun is tilting away from her Great Mother. (1) There is a slight inclination of the earth towards the dark, which will not become really evident until the autumn.

Surrounded by signs of burgeoning life it is difficult to recognize that there is also a death, a completion. Roses are in full bloom. Mother kookaburras are at the beck and call of young as large as themselves. But it is necessary that the sun ‘dies’. The power of the sun is feared for the dangers to our skin which clothes us, and to our homes which give us shelter. In most of the aforessted areas of Australia bushfires are an ever present threat, reminder that fullness of light must give way to the dark for our safety and for our wellbeing.

There is purpose to the dark, the shadow, although it is sometimes hard to see it. In summer many of us seek the shade to protect our fair skins. In mythic tales the hero is forever vigilant against the impending forces of destruction, symbolized so strongly in
our culture by darkness. His resistance is a futile attempt to stave off the inevitable, unlike the modern super heroes who do not know failure. To find harmony in permanency is not possible since it is nature’s way to promote creation and growth through change. It is timely to remember that the sun is within us and will return to fullness in the fullness of time.

Ritual celebrations are social occasions with a purpose, in which participants both offer and receive. At Litha we can feel the complementarity of the fear and love we bring, the power and union we want to feel. To honour the determination of the latent sun energy in the women who have gone before, our mothers in her-story, our group decide to hold a dinner party. Each woman brings festive food and the story of a woman she admires to the table, and a symbol of that woman’s strengths. We share and we learn for our mutual empowerment. (2)

Cornucopia — O Mother Sun

The continuity, line of descent almost, is becoming evident to me in the way I use blocks from a previous quilt in the next one. There is an inheritance. I harvest, gather up leftover blocks of snail trail (which I prefer to call the spiral block) and some pinwheels and feel a momentary balance as the central motif of the Summer Solstice quilt takes shape. I want this quilt to be a celebration of life’s fullness, a reminder of the richness available in experience.

I am working with strong colours, blood reds and blazing yellows, and more delicate patterns, images of the transient — daisies, tiny flowers and a paisley fabric which, whilst it reminds me of bushfires also has a small green bird in it. It could be the phoenix. The juxtaposition of the fabrics creates not only the feeling of triumph and powerful energy, but also of tenuous union: ‘Blossom and thorn, fragrance and blood.’ (3)

The pinwheels placed at the four corners take on significance as the four directions, all involved in the midsummer celebration. In the east, at the top right hand corner of the quilt, is the soft
light of dawn, pregnant with possibility, as is every meaningful communication: so often hesitant and tentative, yet with the potential of opening to a deeper understanding. Moving counter clockwise, in the north there is the blood red of fiery passion in the ripening of apples, while in the west, the waters teem with life as do the deep waters of our emotional underworlds. I later decide to use some bright fish fabric for the backing as well. The fish has been from very early times symbol of the Great Mother and it is in the dark womb, the amniotic fluid of the great Mother Ocean that all life formed. In the southern corner sunflowers bloom in abundance from the belly of Mother Earth.

The energy of this quilt is inescapable in its forcefulness, in spite of its rather conventional style. I notice that the central spiral moves in a counter clockwise direction. Known in the European tradition as ‘widdershins’, counter clockwise movement brings a decrease and lessening of power. On the other hand, movement which increases and draws down power follows the direction of the sun’s movement, a counter clockwise movement from east to west across our southern skies. 4) And the festival day of Summer Solstice celebrates the highest point of the sun’s powers for the year.

Pieced together into this configuration, I feel somewhat annoyed that the spirals are reminiscent of a swastika, symbol for the twentieth century western world of power through the most extreme practices of domination. I seek another connection with the symbol, to look at it from another perspective. My guess, based on a growing trust in my gut feeling, is that the image has been turned around, that there has been an earlier, more empowering and valid relationship to the swastika.

Sure enough, I find that the Hook Cross of the Nazis goes back to 10,000 BCE, found carved into mammoth ivory and in Sanskrit means ‘so be it’ or ‘amen’. It was used as widely apart as in the Greek cultures and in Japan. In later periods, the swastika was used by the Buddha and by early Christians. With the arms pointing to the left, it is known for its feminine moon side and it
represents the dark half of the year, when the strength of the sun wanes, suggesting the Sun God’s decline at his death and later resurrection at the Winter Solstice. (5)

When I read this I am amazed by the persistence of the moon imagery showing up in my quilts. It was definitely without invitation that she turned up in the Summer Solstice quilt, celebration of the sun. But I should be starting to realize that so-called opposites are always intrinsically present. It’s just a case of developing the insight or intuition to be able to recognize them and feel their respective influences.

It occurs to me that the back of a quilt is as informative as the front, as deserving of attention as are the inner dark spaces, the worlds inhabited by the psyche and variously called the subconscious, the liminal, intuition, emotions. I write in my journal during the process of making Cornucopia: ‘In honouring the differences and finding or inventing the connections, we come to see an emergent pattern of wholeness, richness and beauty.’

This is one of the first pieces I have quilted, and I feel ambivalent about my capacity. There are many different shapes to work with and directions to go in. An overall grid-like design seems incongruous, too structured and controlling. The angular designs on the vessels and small female figurines of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods of prehistory come to mind.

My memory does not go back much beyond my mother’s grandmother whom I came to know about only by name and a short story about her death. My own grandmother had died when I was about eight. At an early women’s spirituality workshop I attended we sat in a circle with other women, eyes closed, going back in time generationally at first, naming. Then in eras, simply feeling. I was young in my dreaming, not having started to show signs of womanhood yet. I became aware of a woman elder of the tribe sitting with me by the creek bed as it flowed over the pebbles and rocks. As she handed me the cooking vessel containing a little clay figurine with bowed head and obviously
carrying life within, I knew I had gone as far as I needed in seeking my roots.

A decision is made that is both technically as well as spiritually appropriate. In joining the three layers together, using triangles, lozenge shapes, zig-zags, square spirals and spirals, I am exploring an ancient language. They are glyphs designed and used no doubt in reverence for the Mystery of life, death and regeneration, witnessed in and by the seasonal cycles of heaven, of earth, and manifest in the body of woman. (6)

Notes for Chapter 6

1 In many present-day indigenous cultures, including amongst some tribes of the Australian Aborigines, the sun has a female sex. Learning about these myths is not in order to justify equal and opposite discrimination. As Patricia Monaghan says in the introduction to her collection of sun myths, entitled O Mother Sun, ‘...we must not separate or dichotomize the world anymore. Night and day, death and life, black and white — these are not opposites any more than are the sun and the moon, or men and women. Her myths and rituals help us restore wholeness to our lives.’ (1994:7)

2 Judy Chicago, in cooperation with many artists, created a major monument of twentieth century art and culture known as The Dinner Party. Worked in ceramics and textiles, it commemorates 39 women in history: 13 legendary archetypes, 13 from history and 13 from the present time.


4 In the Chapter ‘Creating Religion: Towards the Future’, Starhawk discusses the beauty of the circle as symbol and image for a mythos which awakens ecological interdependence, community, and Self-healing and knowledge.

5 This paragraph is a summary of the entry under ‘swastika’ in Barbara Walker’s Encyclopedia (1983:964).

6 Marija Gimbutas has written several books about her archaeological discoveries in which she posits a theory about human spirituality and religion in prerecorded history by following the links between mythologies, linguistics, ethnography and folklore. In The Language of the Goddess she calls the geometric motifs on figurines and pottery ‘an alphabet of the metaphysical’, creating links between the motifs and an early image of the deity which she concludes to be female (1989:1).
What rises must fall to spill its seed. What ripens must drop to earth and decay... Call the harvest daughter of the Sun, for each ripe fruit and grain is a new womb.

Starhawk, The Spiral Dance
LUGHNASAD

Lammas ~ February 2

The turning wheel brings us to another harvest, that of the grains, and the beginning of the withering and die-back time of the year. The grain crops have grown tall, and matured under the heat of the summer sun. The ears of wheat are heavy with seed. The bees and the birds have done their work and the delicate blossoms of spring have become sturdy fruit. We continue to enjoy the smells and tastes of exotic and juicy fruits as they ripen.

The Goddess is a bountiful Mother; She is also the wielder of the sickle. The season of the Crone will come to remind us that we must let go, be prepared for change. Although the intense heat from the sun's rays is perhaps even stronger than at the Summer Solstice, it is time to be aware of the decline to the north of the sun's path across the sky.

There is a sense of anticipation, of impending completion, a promise of rest hanging in the air. In the metaphorical season of the soul the hard work of preparation also is over. Seeds have been planted; the boughs of fruit trees laden with colourful burdens have been propped up. In the breathing space of Lughnasad we can briefly look back before getting ready to bend our backs to pick the fruits of our harvest, to store up sustenance in readiness for the impending dark.
When in the late seventies I lived in Israel as a volunteer on a kibbutz reaping the harvest under a hot sun in a strong blue sky was my main occupation during one part of the year. Memory of fruitful abundance in the orchards of sun-gold oranges and moon-yellow grapefruit ripe for the picking remains vivid. Every afternoon we took some back to our little bungalows to squeeze fresh juice, with hardly an hour passing between the plucking from the branch to the pouring into the glass.

For Celtic peoples it was the sacrificial death of Lug the Sun God that was celebrated on this day, hence one of the names this Crossquarter Day is known by is Lughnasad. It is possible that the name derives from ‘lugal’, the title bestowed on a sacred king chosen as the consort of the Goddess. (1) It was Lug for whom the town of London was named originally Lugdunum. Anglo-Saxonized the festival became known as Lammas, for the baking of the symbolic loaf from the first grains in offering and thanksgiving. Drained of life-giving energy in ripening the grains the strength of the sun is fading, but her life-renewing energy is passed on through the loaf baked at this festival.

The symbolism of bread as the staff of life is universal in western countries. The grain is harvested and threshed, ground and kneaded, transformed to make food. The loaves, symbolic of life’s process, are broken and shared around the table as we give thanks to the Mother for the rich gifts from her soil. We give thanks for the Mystery of the seed, which is both edible food and contains the germ of life for the next cycle’s harvest.

In the blessing of the loaf we remember again the waxing and waning of psychological seasons and become aware of the value of our own ‘seed stock’, our experience, as well as becoming surer of ourselves as agents in our own transformation. The power of the seed is its Mystery: the continual miracle of the cycle of transformation and regeneration. The seed of the Mystery is that plants and trees, all creatures, goddesses, gods and mortals, contain within themselves their own means of regeneration.
Having been born and raised in the city the song I'd heard in childhood urging the harvest moon to 'shine on' meant little. I remember, a few years ago, when I saw her rise over the horizon in the East, golden and round, she seemed to reflect the fields of wheat in my imagination and again the desire to know more set in. In my imagination I saw people, women, men and children bent over in the fields, continuing their labours as long as light would permit in order to bring in the grain harvest. Under the early rising harvest moon the hours of light by which to bring in the crops might be extended. I now know the harvest moon I had heard about long ago in song around the family piano is the full moon which appears, golden and glowing, before the next festival of Autumn Equinox.

Three different aspects of textile manipulation evolved during my work in the harvest season, in the end forming a whole, a unit, combining into one. I compare them to manifestations of the triple aspect of the Goddess: the Virgin (Between the Worlds), the Mother (Lap of the Mother), and the Crone (Ritual Cloth for Sekhmet). Whilst these triple aspects of the Goddess conform to the life stages of women they are not confined to the physical. In the realms of the psyche, the virginal aspect pertains to forthrightness and independence; mothering to responding to the needs for our own growth; and growth in the wisdom of the elders to every spiral of the circle of experience and understanding.

**Between the Worlds**

This is perhaps the most enigmatic of all the quilts for me. It has been given several different names over its time of preparation. Unlike the other quilts on the Wheel, which were made mostly within the season of their inspiration, this all-black quilt was made gradually, piecemeal over the three years since I had started patchwork. This was partly due to the fact that all the quilting was done by hand, but the seed did not reveal its Mystery until the completion of all the other pieces on the Wheel.
My memory spirals back to my wanting to make a quilt which tested the conventional rule of contrasting tonal values: to go completely black — or white. Given my interests in reclaiming the dark as a powerful and positive force, both on the Wheel of the Year and in our soul-cycles, black was the driving inspiration.

Black has a long history of disempowerment, always seen as negative, the dark side as sinister, portending the unknown, harmful and dangerous, engendering feelings of fear and deprivation. After banishment from the mythologies collected in the Bible of her recalcitrant sister Lilith, Eve has carried the burden of provoking evil in our western Judæo-Christian culture. Unlike Lilith, who flew off into the night in a rage, Eve seems to have accepted her fateful role at the hands of the emerging monotheistic culture. Both women and people with dark skin have carried the burden in their bodies, of pathological fear of the dark, exhibited most detrimentally towards women by persistent and perverted attempts to control our sexuality. (2)

It is an arbitrary decision to cut rectangular shapes of foundation fabric on which to crazy patch the black swatches of fabric. I have been thrilled by the donations from my fellow quilters, most of whom work in a conventional patchwork style, of black fabric of any denomination. I start to think about choices and realise that, as women and mothers, we live more often than not in an arbitrary space not totally of our choosing, mostly unacknowledged, somewhere between the worlds. And yet we can be in our power through our creativity because it is in this space that magic happens. (3)

During the school year I go to a science workshop at the local library with my son to witness another manifestation of magic. Following the steps of the experiment we discover that a black felt-tip pen contains all the colours of the spectrum! At school I had learned that white light contained the rainbow, hidden in the prism. I watch the sunlight pierce the cut crystal in my window and the colours of the rainbow appear on the walls of
the room. It makes me more determined to make a quilt from only black fabrics, to see the seed of light hidden in the dark.

The usual formation of eight blocks evolves. In ritual mode eight is the magic number of the seasons, but the formation needs to become a nine patch, leaving a gaping hole in the centre. How to fill the gap I wonder over and over. Do I fill the gap or leave it empty? The Goddess Inanna seems to be proffering a solution to my dilemma. The ancient Sumerian myth is the oldest ciphered record known. Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, allows herself to be hung on a hook to die, her worldly finery and articles of clothing surrendered piece by piece at each of the seven gates into the Underworld. (4)

Yet even in her surrender she remains resolute to the call from her sister, moving gate by gate inexorably downwards, seemingly towards her own destruction. She is becoming more vulnerable, but has also hatched a plan of escape which her maidservant will carry out at the end of three days should it become necessary. She is the original saviour, redeeming the fertility of crops, animals and her people by submitting to the darkness, the unknown, taking the necessary risks to comfort and learn from her sister, the dark Goddess Ereshkigal in her time of need. Upon the absolute submission of Inanna, Ereshkigal suffers anguishing birth pangs, groaning incessantly as Inanna returns, bringing life to the world above, born of the union of destruction and creation. (5)

As I work intermittently over the three year period with the black fabrics of the banner to Inanna, using small quilting-size stitches, threading a bead onto the needle every now and then, the beads become seeds, symbols of her fruitfulness, found and sown in the dark. During the process of working on this quilt, quite unexpectedly out of the darkness other Goddesses present for reflection. Firstly Aphrodite, seeded in the dark depths of the life-giving oceans, Goddess of sexuality and love, she whose flower emblem is formed by the six petals formed in the shape of a mandorla, or the vesica piscis, inside a circle. (6)
Next comes Artemis the virgin Goddess, protector and hunter of the animals with whom she shared wilderness as home. At Ephesus in Roman times she was known as Diana, the black Mother Goddess, the ever provident, imaged with many breasts with which to suckle her multiple young. As with other ancient and black Goddesses there is no dualistic dilemma about her personal attributes here. She is at once virginal and motherly, independent and depended upon, dependable and obviously sexual and procreative. The six tassles on the motherly pendulous breasts at the bottom edge of the banner are for Diana, the coupled beads along the guipure lace for Artemis.

How to fill the gaping hole in the centre of the banner still eludes me. I feel it has something to do with the seed of light within darkness, but it is rather too large a hole. Various ideas present themselves: it may be a mirror, unseen until seen, just as others can be for us in our times of darkness when we see the shadow self ‘through a glass darkly’.

The idea of the veil floats across my consciousness, perhaps linking back to Inanna from whose story I have heard came the dance of the seven veils, originally a sacred ritual performance of the myth. From pure lust for the sheeriness of the fabric I had bought the piece of stuff many moons ago, thinking somehow to drape it across the banner. I take it out to enjoy it again and as I think about using it for the centre I start to stitch it curtain-like across the space. As I gather the first edge, rolling it back with strong stitches, I realise the image I am forming, bringing to mind the outrage, pain and humiliation suffered by young girls and women in traditions where genital mutilation is deemed necessary for a woman’s acceptability for marriage and thereby security in life. The resultant loss of trust in the mother is reinforced generation after generation.

Nevertheless the overall effect of the quilt remains positive. Somewhere between light and dark, the space, split, slit in the centre, is the space of magic, of creation. Is it that space which in
ancient myths is termed the void? It was said that in the union of
the light and the dark creation takes place, creation calling itself
into existence. Although it is all black, the union of opposites is
somehow present in this quilt, imaginally in the torn veil, in the
void space of the *vesica piscis*, the seat of creation and throne of
Life.

**Lap of the Mother**

I wonder what to do with a small porcelain doll presented to me
to dress for an exhibition. She has come to me as a very
conventional doll with alabaster skin, dressed in clothes from
the turn of the century — every little girl’s dream doll. My
childhood memory of dolls are of the two, one each that my sister
and I received one year for Christmas. I remember knitting clothes
for mine and painting her fingernails and her lips with nail polish.
But this doll, needing urgent transformation within the week,
has ideas of her own.

The urge to create her a Black Virgin is both inescapable and
elusive. It is a complex and mysterious image. The energies of
the creative dark are particularly present at this time of year,
though the presence of black Goddesses can always be felt even
as I invoke the so-called white Goddesses. The title of Robert
Graves’ book, *The White Goddess*, conjures up for me an artificial
perspective as though I might exclude the one from the other,
separate them out, leave the fearful dark behind. Archetypically
perhaps we may divide and define for the sake of order and
sequence. But reality is not quite so simple.

In thinking of the Black Virgins I become conscious of a spiralling,
cyclic motion both inclusive and outside time. I feel as though I
am standing in a dense forest. I look around for a direction and
when I find it, I know I can identify the other directions. The
west, south, east do not disappear, though I may decide to head
north. I am engaging in a different, perhaps feminine or womanly
way of perceiving by remaining aware of and including the
energy of the opposite. (7)
The wonder and fascination of the Black Virgins is their time warp. Their genealogy flows steadfastly within the human spiritual story and can be retrieved at any point. They have family connections with Artemis and Aphrodite, Diana and Cybele, Ishtar and Inanna and back to Isis, who was known to the Egyptian peoples as ‘She From Whom All Becoming Arose’. The extant mythology shows Isis in the context of perfect wife and mother, re-storied by the new right to property and children through patrilinear descent. We also know Isis as the personification of the Life-force itself, the great healing force not only for individuals, but for healing oppression and injustices in the emerging patriarchal society as a whole. Hints of her earlier independence, both sexual and temporal, are found in the story of the Sumerian Goddess, Inanna. (8)

The complex legacy I read of the Black Madonnas seems to come to a pivotal point, evokes a cone of energy. As I become more aware of her energy the ‘Lap of the Mother’ calls herself into creation. The transformation becomes apparent as I start to think about something for the doll to sit on. It has to be a throne, albeit plain, much like the simple ones I have seen in photos of the many little statues still venerated in chapels across France.

Scrounging around for wood cast-offs a friend offers me an old bedhead, excitedly pointing out that the turned legs could be upturned to form pillars and the heart-shaped decorative piece could become a back. She is in tune with the ‘out of destruction comes creation’ instinct, and we set about performing the magic of shape-shifting the old bedhead. The project seems to be becoming a fetish for me, as I patch together the significant overlaps between mythic stories and the history of the Black Madonnas in Europe. (9)

In the process of its transformation I start to see glimpses of the black Goddesses, particularly Isis whose hieroglyph, or sacred symbol, is the throne. Right to the throne of political leadership for the king was secured by the sacred marriage or hieros gamos,
between the Goddess or her priestess and her consort, and was perceived as a marriage between the people and the land so that it may be fruitful. The original derivation of the notion of a throne being the seat of power therefore is its association with the sexual life-giving powers at the ‘lap’ of the mother. (10)

I continue in the vein of what I have read about the Black Virgins. The Church theologians in their bid to annul her origins had said that the Virgin was not really black, simply ‘sooty’ from the candles burned by devoted followers over the centuries. My idea is to try to make her look wooden since most of the statues found throughout Europe are carved in wood. But the little white doll has other plans for her transformation and my attempts to give her face the appearance of wood grain do not stick. She demands to be painted black and I have to listen.

This moves her into a new dimension for me, exciting, powerful and transforming. My intention had been to make clothes for the Virgin which imitate the appearance of smoked wood, dull and dirty. Looking at her blackened face I am with Isis again and I start to envisage the clothes worn by the proud, straight-backed women of Africa today, vibrantly coloured and boldly patterned fabrics meshing together in all their variety and distinctiveness. Taking a lovely piece of batik a friend brought back as a gift from Nigeria I start to cut it into strips, conscious of destroying a quite wonderful piece of fabric. I then read that Isis wore a many-coloured garment which ‘reflected the multiplicity of nature’ and I feel vindicated. (11)

I feel as I work with the image that I am merging attributes of the ancient black Goddesses — power, fertility, sexuality — with the compassionate energies of the Black Virgin. As Christian Madonna, even with the child on her lap, she has become the archetype of pure spirit separated from her sexuality, castrated and burdened for centuries with men’s fears of her creative sexual energies. I feel sure that those who still worship her as La Vierge Noire resonate to her profound embodiment of the Ultimate
Mysteries of Life, Death and Rebirth. Having been the midwife in bringing to birth my Black Madonna with her child, I feel re-created myself as woman and mother, sexual and nurturing, fruitful and redemptive, knowing there is growth in both dark and light.

**Ritual Cloth for Sekhmet**

At the same time as working on the doll’s transformation, commercial fabric printed with lions catches my eye and the desire to work more pieces into the patchwork story of Isis becomes irresistible. In making the headgear for my Black Virgin Isis I had found reference to the sisters of Isis and because of personal occurrences in my life, was drawn to one in particular, Sekhmet. As the crone in the triad, enacting the end of a cycle through wise destruction, her powers are in harmony with the season of waning at this time on the Wheel.

Sekhmet is the Implacable Mother, inevitable in her task of giving life through death. She is imaged as the great lion-headed, bare-breasted Goddess of the desert, wearing the scarf of royalty. I have given this headgear to my Isis, and adorned it with the horns of the new moon, symbol of the new life cycle which she promises. Sekhmet’s gift is the decay which both releases the soul energy after death, and forms the compost on which the life energy feeds. I become aware of all these ideas as I make the simple cloth to place under the throne of the Black Virgin.

As I think of the great lioness of the plains, I also honour my own watchful eye and resourcefulness, qualities which are essential to caring for the defenceless young. I see her lying under the emergence of a star-studded canopy above, as cubs play nearby. She is resting after taking her fill from the beast she has hunted and killed to feed her cubs — the end of a life to nurture new life is the unwritten law. The oncoming dark does not disturb her tranquillity. She is known to protect unswervingly and with finality should the need arise. She knows her own power for creation out of destruction. The great Mother Sekhmet has reaped the harvest for sustenance and nurturance and lies back content.
At the four corners of the cloth I use a block known as birds in the air. I read that Sekhmet is helped in her task by large black birds, scavengers of the air which fall to the ground to take the leftovers to feed their young. They come from all directions to participate in and complete the process of picking clean the bones. They fly in from the four corners, the four directions of my ritual cloth for Sekhmet, and assist in the process of transforming apparently negative energies into those necessary to preserve life. As assistants to Sekhmet they too are the symbols of those dark Goddesses, revered and feared, living by the light which only darkness can bring. (12)

Sekhmet, like all crone Goddesses, may be considered merciful as much as the vengeful bringer of retribution. She sees what needs to be done in order to protect new life and for the young to take off in security and power. It feels to me that Sekhmet is the embodiment of the term ‘indigenous consciousness’ for women because of her deep connection with and knowledge of her pride/tribe, of her surroundings, of the ways of instinctive nurture. She assesses the scene, suggests and cajoles, nudges and snaps at just the right times. She claims her autonomy and when need arises, hone her skills in the hunt. Murry Hope describes her as the ‘archetypal woman who appears when she is needed, has the strength to make her mark in a male dominated society, and does a good job of “polishing off” that which has outlived its usefulness, during which process she naturally makes numerous enemies’. (13)
Notes for Chapter 7

1 One of the central motifs to express the changing of the seasons and the cycle of life, death, decay and regeneration is the sacrifice of the Sun God, which assures fertility. The early Sumerian, Babylonian, Christian and later Celtic myths are cross-fertilized by this idea. I feel some remote sense of connection to these ancient customs when I read the plaque on my local Civic Centre which commemorates the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and her consort, Prince Philip, to our vicinity in 1970.

2 Lilith, like Ereshkigal, can be interpreted more powerfully as a dyadic sister of Eve, creating wholeness rather than as a sister whose rebellion is the dark/evil side of Eve’s submission to the light/good. As we know them, they represent dualistic and opposing forces, in dis-harmony and competition. Black and white can be seen as essentially complementary, one and the same.

3 Starhawk talks about magic as changing consciousness at will, or ‘the art of evoking power-from-within. Art implies the skills and knowledge that empowers us to create.’ In the case of magic, these skills are ‘the techniques of moving and shaping energy’ (in Truth or Dare, 1987:24). In ritual circles the energies of inspiration, will, feeling and groundedness are called with the directions, after which the following verse is spoken.

   We are between the worlds,
   Where night and day, birth and death, joy and sorrow, meet as one.

4 Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Kramer have spent their professional lives dedicated to compiling the records from archival collections around the world and translating and interpreting the Inanna story. It is a fascinating myth, extant from about the middle of the third millennium BCE, having had many layers of meaning placed upon it by many writers.

5 The story of Inanna would seem to have found its source as explanation of the cycle of the seasons. The theme is reiterated down the centuries in the Hellenic story of Persephone, the Kore, redeemer perforse; and by the life of Jesus of Nazareth, whose act of redemption follows the same path of descent and resurrection but which transcends the outcome, from seasonal enjoyment in earthly delights in life, to heavenly ones after death.

6 These terms were used by medieval alchemists to describe the act of creation, using the diagram of two circles overlapping. The point of overlap between two circles symbolized the union of male and female energies needed for creation. To form a mandorla the circumference of each circle runs through the centre point of the other, leaving an almond
vulva-like shape, a yoni. It is a very ancient symbol and the term *vesica piscis* means vessel of the fish and was an obvious sexual reference. Barbara Walker outlines the many connections of this symbol with both Isis and Aphrodite (1983:1045).

7 A very important and early book in the field entitled *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, listed in the Further Reading, revalues the ways women communicate, often neglected and undervalued by the dominant intellectual ethos. Intuition is starting to be re-cognized for its validity and the inherent power of perception it offers.

8 The entry under Isis in Barbara Walker makes many links between Isis and other Goddesses of the ancient world. The connection of Isis with healing is well documented by Kathleen Alexander-Berghorn in Nicholson (ed), *The Goddess Re-Awakening*. It is interesting to note that in Poland the Black Madonna of Czestochowa was patroness of the Solidarity movement.

9 Rather than the usual implications associated with the word fetish, I prefer the rendition in the Macquarie dictionary: ‘a commonly inanimate object, regarded with awe as being the embodiment of habitation of a potent spirit, or as having magical potency because of the materials and methods used in compounding it.’

10 Myths recount Isis’ cyclic relationship with her son, Horus, who as fruit of her womb is imaged sitting on her lap and her husband Osiris, who also ‘sits’ on her lap in the sacred marriage to assure the fecundity of the earth for another year. In early societies descent was ascertained by the mother-line, which included children and things attached to the mother. Rachel Pollack argues in her recent book, *The Body of the Goddess*, that it was the transfer of this linearity which ultimately disempowered women (1997:123). It interests me to read in Wolkstein that in the Sumerian text of Inanna’s story the word for womb, vulva, loins and lap is by no accident the same.


12 The two major primeval deities of Egypt were the Cobra Goddess of Lower Egypt, the *uraeus* being present on the headdress of monarchs, and the Vulture Goddess of Upper Egypt. They were both female because they were thought to be self-producing, that is, parthenogenetic.

Autumn's grain is spring's seed

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*
MABON

Autumn Equinox ~ March 20 - 23

At the last of the harvest celebrations the long journey around the sun comes full circle. We ride on the belly of Mother Earth who provides us daily with sustenance from her own body. Without feeling a pause, a full turn of the Wheel of the Year is evident in the vegetable patch, in the die-back of the last tomato and zucchini plants and the chill crisp mornings. The seeds we planted in spring have lived out their life cycle and still we enjoy their fruits. Fallen fruits and falling leaves go back into the soil as compost, nutrients for the seed.

This is the second festival day of the year when the earth for a moment stands upright on her axis before the angle tilts towards the sun. Momentarily light and dark are in balance, a balance which gives way and brings an ending. Just as at sunset there is an end, a loss, there is also a beginning, an opportunity. Beginnings to days and years in the old way of reckoning the passing of time belong to the dark. All forms of life begin in the dark: seeds germinate, roots spread down in search of nourishment for the tree above, the young of most creatures including the human species spend the earliest and most fragile periods of their lives completely in the dark.

At Mabon the remainder of the crops is harvested. (1) It is therefore a time of reckoning, of balancing, which sometimes presents as a dilemma. In the countryside, this was the time for deciding what must be saved for the long barren months ahead.
and for gathering in the last fodder for the animals. (2) This is the
time for both collecting and storing seed, and for letting it fall to
the ground and be blown on the winds. It is time to bottle and
pickle, dry and preserve, as the days start to get shorter than the
nights.

I sometimes ponder as I drive the car to the supermarket to buy
our food, that in pagan times the opportunity to live in harmony
with the rhythms of nature fed the need to create meaning and
gave meaning to custom. There was a deep connection between
how the seasonal festivals were celebrated and the (sometimes
harsh) realities of life. And the custom of making a pudding
stuffed full of plums, grapes and figs, gathered and dried over
the months preceding Yule was a response in direct relationship
to the world around.

In December at the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the Year,
though the light hours start to diminish the balance is still in
favour of the light. At the Equinox in March we are aware of the
tip to the dark side, as daylight gives way to the night. Again we
find ourselves in the space of equalizing, of 'holding the
opposites'. Autumn Equinox marks the beginning of the darkest
half of the year. (3)

At the peak of the harvest season, after much frivolity and feasting
and enjoying the ease of living, it is time to turn to serious
reflection, to pour libations and honour the giving and the taking,
the summer and the winter, life and death. We mourn the loss of
summer, of the god consort, our lover, though we sense that our
every act of love is an act of union and assurance of returning
life. We are now heading into the spiral, down the path of the
labyrinth towards the centre, to that place of quiet reflection, the
turning point, the void, where there is ultimately only love of
Self. It is a place which we may not reach until the full dark of
Winter Solstice.

Mabon is the last of the solar festivals on this turn of the Wheel.
For the peoples known as the early Greeks and long into the
period known as classical, this season was the beginning of the celebration of the Mysteries. They were told according to the story of the Great Mother Demeter and her daughter Persephone and observed by initiates to the place of the omphalos, the place at Eleusis where the umbilical connection was renewed with the Great Mother. The age-old story must have begun around the fires at night at the onset of winter to explain the departure of green from the trees and light from the skies. (4)

As part of the Eleusinian Mysteries the oracular wisdom of the sybil, the wise old priestess, was sought by visiting her in caves, usually where subterranean waters flow, symbolic of the life-giving waters of the womb. The keeper of secrets and of hidden truths, she was consulted by those ready to listen to the voice of the Mother, those ready to hear earth’s wisdom, the plain truth hiding in the soul. The knowledge, sustenance for the soul, which was gained in these underground realms was kept secret. I believe it is woven into myths and legends, revealed in the language of poetry, song and chants, and in all creative endeavours.

In the seasons of the soul it is a time for letting go. As the leaves drop to the earth from their branches, the turning inwards is an acknowledgement that the source of life and transformation is to be found in the inner darkness. It is the inner ‘gnowing’ which points us in the direction we need to go. In our ritual we look into our hearts for the crop we now harvest and to the seeds we want to plant again in the encroaching dark. As we throw wheat grains into the fire we make wishes for their sprouting, knowing that they will lie dormant in the dark of not-gnowing for a while. At the following Eostar, in spring, we will see them standing tall and green, heavy with ripening seed, rising from the ashes of our Mabon fire. (5)

Kali Ma: I destroy to create

This was probably the quickest of all the quilts to come together, perhaps because of the directness of the style and the simple colour scheme of contrasts. I can’t help but think how typical it is

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in the process of its creation of the characteristic by which the Goddess Kali is known — her ruthless finality, her decisive choices. (The etymological root of the word decisive means to kill.) With unflinching clarity, suddenly and swiftly, as remorselessly as the hunting lioness, Kali destroys to create. I am not known to exhibit such capacity normally but during the process of making this quilt I had a taste of it.

It all starts with an irresistible urge, an almost unquenchable need to let go of using a pattern, to use freehand unmeasured cutting with the rotary cutter. I want to ‘cut loose’ and feel my own irretrievable hand in the cutting, myself in the finality of decision. Starting with freely cut red and black diamonds I then cut strip lengths, in white also, and also without using a ruler. I then strip around the edges of the small diamonds alternating the colours, taking no care about uniformity of size. It is not planned. It just happens, and the resultant feeling of freedom is expansive, the commitment freeing, despite the seeming contradiction in terms.

The process is also inspired by seeing some Afro-American quilts which, whilst essentially patchwork in design, express that quality of improvisation which for me means starting with what is at hand: colours, shape, and a commitment to freedom about the ultimate outcome, although intention is firmly grounded in purpose of some kind. I realize that the approach of these quilters may have been influenced by socioeconomic considerations. As women we are used to cutting our cloth according to our means. But looking at their quilts I am aware of another dimension to the process. Through their quilts these Afro-American women are expressing themselves as direct descendants of a cultural heritage, one founded in love of movement and music, of colour and an unquenchable thirst for freedom.

Listed by Marija Gimbutas as one of the most ancient symbols scratched and painted into the sacred figurines of Neolithic peoples in Europe, the diamond or the lozenge shape represented not only sexual maturity for the wearer, but honoured women’s procreative powers as the source and expression of the Mystery.
The symbol lasted well into the second millennium BCE as the Sheila-na-gig, who was found in dancing rows as structural decoration on Irish churches. She is unashamedly demonstrative of the life-giving power which resides in the vulva, the gateway of Life. The lozenge shape probably imparted power as a magic symbol to help women through the transition of giving birth. (6)

During the process of piecing the lozenge-shaped blocks the title of a book catches my attention: Women’s Work, the First 20,000 Years. Subtitled ‘Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times’, it is a fascinating account of early fibre arts, seen as an enormous economic force belonging primarily to women, though much has been lost to history mainly through the perishability of the product. I am also amazed at the important influence of women’s role not only in the establishment of the fabric industry, but thereby on the fabric of society. Elizabeth Wayland Barber asserts that rather than building great mounds for dead heroes like the men, in an attempt to gain immortality, ‘cloth for thousands of years was the notebook that recorded the woes and joys, hopes, visions and aspirations of women’. And it still does, I mentally add. (7)

The analogy between spinning and weaving and the creative power to bring new life into the world would seem to be as old as time. The myths of very early Goddesses who worked with thread to bring souls back into life cross continents and cultures. As already noted, the spider as fate-weaver was the totemic creature of the Goddess Athena, come to us through the evolution of Greek culture; Maya, and her crone aspect, Kali, are found in the Hindu pantheon.

In her book, Barber weaves connections between the present day peasant costumes of eastern Europe and early figurines from the era of the Willendorf Venus (on and inside the front cover of this book). Many of the Venus figurines wear an apron of string around their hips which Barber deduces had the prime symbolic function (since they offered neither warmth nor protection) of indicating the sexual maturity or availability of the wearer. She
compares these to the aprons with long fringed skirts attached and embroidered with black, white and red lozenge shapes which are still worn with the same significance in the regions where the Venus figurines have been found. (8)

In placing the lozenge-shaped blocks side by side, fractal-like, the shape multiplies and forms larger lozenges. Realizing that I am creating a banner made from probably the most ancient of fertility symbols it seems an irony that I start to feel the presence of Kali Ma. It may be the shape the blocks fall into creating a masklike appearance with the long, pointed and protruding tongue of Kali, which evokes a feeling of destruction and death. The feeling may have been initiated by the simple process of cutting the whole pieces of fabric into multiple strips which are then called into creation, reconstructed into shape by my desire to give them form. The mysterious dynamic of creative and destructive forces turns the Wheel of creativity.

Since it is an Equinox quilt, the placing of equal proportions of black and white on either side of the large V-shape is an easy decision to make. Even with the three primary colours of white, red and black, representing respectively Virgin, Mother and Crone, there is balance to the form, a continuity, a flow which repeats—like the movement of a spiral, completing yet returning, seeking balance in imbalance, just as Kali moves through destruction to creation and back. The fringe along the bottom edge reminds me, as it did those peoples of prehistoric Europe, of the mysterious ability to create new life residing in the body of woman.

The emblem, the almost shield-like banner which emerges, is definitely Kali's, Destroyer and Creator. Like so many of the very early Goddesses, Kali is a dark Goddess, reminiscent of the Egyptian Maat in her inexorability, her clear evenhandedness, but she has a more ferocious and fearful visage. And like Sekhmet, She is the Implacable One, the Ultimate Harvester. In one of her fairly recent twentieth-century portraits she seems to hold the
centuries of rage against the power of the feminine. This projection has her appear as totally heartless, wearing a string of severed heads around her neck, her tongue lolling greedily out of her mouth, a ferocious set to her eyes.

Without knowing the reason, I was very much attracted to this image when I first saw it four or five years ago, early in my exploration of women’s spirituality. (9) It did not take me long to realize that it was my own rage which originally drew me to her. And here I find myself facing it again, owning its energy and power, recognizing the Goddess of Self in its expression. I am reversing the millennia of rage against the power of the feminine by feeling the power in my anger at the irresponsible action of my child’s father who left without warning soon after his birth. I feel the strength in my rage at the injustices which for centuries have been perpetrated against women, inflicted on our psyches, our bodies and our children, enshrined in law and religious tenet, and evidenced in economic disadvantage through the years of child-raising. I rage at the degradation of the living planet, our home, and the source of our being. The other side of the Mater Dolorosa, the accepting, submissive and powerless woman, begins to show in me. Rather than accepting the fear and envy of the feminine power for procreation projected onto me simply because I am woman, I notice that I am beginning to live more comfortably with expressing the justifiable anger I feel.

I know it is the yearning for social justice on the personal and global levels which has motivated me to seek healing through my creative endeavours. The fire in the belly draws me to the earth wisdom of Kali Ma, the irrevocable justice she embodies and deals out during the course of a life, the final expression of which is our mortality. She needs no blindfold in the exercise of her duty. Her eyes are wide open, filled with discernment and compassion. Hers is the task of divine retribution, the counterpart of rage, yet another manifestation of the Wheel towards personal wholeness and universal healing.
On a bushwalk I find a branch which has dropped from a large angophora tree which at the time I use as a walking stick. Later I decide to use it to give definition to the rod which must pass through the jagged top edge of the Kali quilt for hanging (rather than the usual piece of dowel). This stick is uncut, whole, and has fallen from a living tree, another ancient symbol of the Goddess. Amalgamated under the general title of the Tree of Life, all trees were embodiments of the Goddess, the Life force. Symbols of this energy were found often as a single ornate pillar in the inner sanctum of temples, and sacred ritual was enacted in groves of trees. The fruit of the tree, the fruit of the womb, assure us in the knowledge that Goddess, the Divine, the numinous One, lives in all things, and with this knowledge we need not fear personal extinction in death. (10)

All the quilts in this series of the Wheel of the Year have a totemic significance. They are symbols of a lived identity. I have adopted the Kali Ma quilt as my personal and tribal totem. It has become more than the Autumn Equinox quilt for me, particularly when I experience myself as an expression of its symbolism: as the Virgin, the Mother and the Crone, holder of immortality through the cycle of destruction, decay and creation, in whose body is the 'eternal living flux'. (12)
Notes for Chapter 8

1 In Celtic tradition Autumn Equinox is known as Mabon from Queen Mabon of the Faeries, who were held to be direct descendants of the Tuatha de Danaan, the tribe of the Goddess. (Barbara Walker 1983:536).

2 In the dilemma are polarities, between which we so often find ourselves oscillating. The term ‘on the horns of a dilemma’ alerts me to the possible derivation from the ceremonies held in ancient Crete to honour the Great Mother, where women as well as men took on the challenge of leaping across the horns of the bull, vaulting at just the right time. The exchange of energy in this act is crucial to maintaining equilibrium, to realize who you are, so as not to end up trailing in the wake of the bull’s energy, literally or metaphorically.

3 ‘Holding the opposites’ is a term I first came across in an interview with Jean Shinoda Bolen reported in Saga (ed. Jonathan Young, 1996:11). She says that the challenge in holding the opposites is to bring into play an active and authentic (self-authored individuation) dynamic which may provide an unexpected resolution. Bolen calls it the ‘transcendent function’, where something shifts and the ‘polarized conflict dissolves’. (This process is what I suspect Starhawk would call magic.) While both polarities live within us, the process of holding the opposites is opposed by our acculturation to collective and traditional roles. It is in the process of holding the opposites that we gain the clarity to make our own choices, to be truly parthenogenetic, alive to the Mystery.

4 After a long day’s walk from Athens the mystae, as they were called, were initiated into secrets which they were under oath never to reveal and which therefore were never passed down. Winding down into an underground cave, considered in metaphor to be the omphalos or navel attachment to the womb of the Great Mother herself, they experienced a revelation of the mysteries of the cycle of life and death and they returned to the surface in ecstasy, without fear. One wonders why an oath was necessary: how does one describe such ‘knowing’. (see note 5)

5 The way I have spelt this word offers a different shade of meaning to the usual understanding we apply to it. In most cases where it is spent with a ‘g’ it refers to an inner way of coming to understanding, rather than being taught externally. It is the way of intuition, discernment gained through experience and often unutterable. Sig Lonegren in his book Labyrinths, says that ‘to know’ means to consciously apprehend the truth/reality of something on both the intuitive and the rational sides of our being (1991:17).
Barbara Walker compares some of the features of the Sheila-na-gig with the figures of Kali as the death Goddess, or Kalika, transferred into Ireland as the Caillech, the Old Woman Creator (ibid:931).

Elizabeth Wayland Barber, 1994:256. The aspirations and hopes and dissent of women expressed through the art of stitchery are explored in another informative book by Rozika Parker, The Subversive Stitch.

In her chapter entitled 'The String Revolution' (1994:42-70) Barber makes other fascinating connections with later classic Greek myth in which Aphrodite, Goddess of sexual love, wears a 'girdle of a hundred tassles' as a badge of her office.

Awesome Power Series, 1987, Swinging Bridges Visuals, South Australia.


Walker, with her long entry on Kali Ma, refers to her as the 'archetypal image of the birth-and-death Mother, simultaneously womb and tomb... symbolizing the inexorable reality of death... her 'OM' was the first creative word (later designated in the Bible to Yahweh) ... her world was an eternal living flux' (ibid:488-496).
Ancient Mother: Anima Mundi

... the same Creative Urge that moves the stars and grows the seed is yours ...

Glenys Livingstone
There is an ending and with it a beginning. People have asked me about the outcome and future direction of my study: where would it lead? Little did I know when I started patchwork quilting as a method of research what latent energies for creation it would awaken. The creative energies awakened by the artform of patching and quilting fabrics have opened up access to new worlds of inquiry, knowledge and inspiration.

There are eight individual quilts in this series, created as living ritual through observation of the Wheel of the Year over three years. Two other pieces are included in the book. The Black Madonna on her throne, which I have called Lap of the Mother, which became part of the circle at Lughnasad, largely because that was when she became manifest and because of her healing qualities and powerful presence. (See plate on page ix.) Ancient Mother: Anima Mundi was created last, at the so-called end of my research process. From a numerological and patchwork point of view, the nine of the pieces of work form a nine patch block, which is complete in itself. With the tenth piece, the next nine patch is starting to take form, and the circle is put in motion for another block of creation.

The last quilt in this book and in the cycle, Ancient Mother: Anima Mundi was created out of my need to resolve a feeling of anxiety which had been showing up in the context of my study, but went a lot deeper. It could be described as a desire to feel wholeness in my life, part of which is being able to authentically share the most vital and intrinsic aspects of myself, to ‘know’ and ‘be true to’ mySelf, as woman and mother. In terms of my study, I felt encouraged and justified when I learned that the word academia derives from the sacred groves of trees dedicated to the Scandinavian Goddess Acca, and were places to gain access to knowledge and wisdom.
The quilt I eventually named *Ancient Mother: Anima Mundi* is essentially about living with structures, those found in nature and those which are societal and contrived for the sake of order and control — and possibly as attempts to bring about a sense of wholeness and unity. The only trouble is that many attempts at unity lead to exclusion and a sense of dissociation for certain groups, most fundamentally women, unless they conform to the dominant structure. Tensions inevitably arise within structures: between separation and union, dismemberment and wholeness, individuality and community. *Anima Mundi* contains a dream for the possibility of taking another look at the many invisible social customs and beliefs arising out of culturally induced and upheld perspectives.

There is growing recognition among scientists of the validity of indigenous, ancient and medieval perceptions which imbue the natural world with soul, a life force, *anima* — spirit. The earth and our bodies are being seen as physical manifestations of the *anima*, the ongoing creative intent of the universe. With the perception that we form part of a dynamically alive universe, rather than a mechanical one, comes the realization that we can create our own meaning and purpose. This is the way of magic, and it happens through the imagination.

It has been my intention to share in this book the process of empowerment which I have experienced in tandem with the creative and healing energies which move in accord with the greater natural cycles. These cycles encompass both birth and death in a mysterious interaction. Many of the ancient myths explain the Mystery of creation as a physical dismemberment and then re-formation through the body of a woman. In her recent book *The Body of the Goddess* (an inspiring journey into the significance of the re-emergence of Goddess consciousness for our present day), Rachel Pollack talks about Goddess as ‘spread into so many parts that She becomes everywhere and nowhere, visible in all things and yet invisible at the same time’ (1997:237). A simple way of describing how I understand Goddess is as
metaphor for my constant awakening to the Mystery of creation, embodying separation and destruction as well as union and creation.

In the process of making a quilt disparate fragments of fabric are joined together to form new connections. In looking at the quilts other women make and in making my own I have watched how through the unity and wholeness, a new meaning emerges from the interplay between the different aspects of fabric, design and purpose. The disparate bits of fabric are joined to become a whole, and yet they retain their significance. Often there are secondary patterns, particularly evident in conventional patchwork quilts, which sometimes you have to squint at in order to see. Like all symbols and artworks, the patterns formed invite another perception, another possible way of seeing.

Integration occurs through the creative process by taking a look from a different perspective. Rather than beginning with the concept of oneness which is broken into fragments, we can watch the way unity emerges from the play between all the different parts. This has been my process in the creation of the quilts, each one expressing visible and invisible stories.

The quilt, as do all acts of creation, engages us in the Mystery, working its own magic by making visible the invisible. The art of magic is that it can never really be explained — it calls up the Mystery which provides meaning and insight simultaneously on the levels of mind, heart and imagination. This is the way of the numinous and that which can be known as the way of the ‘Woman that is in the heart of women’. In those moments of insight, there is a sense of wholeness which is a touchstone to the memory of being whole, bringing the healing and the wholeing.

The Anima Mundi quilt came into being through desire — a desire to recreate the beautiful bush which surrounds my home in the Blue Mountains, and a dream for the preservation of its natural beauty. Like the other quilts in the series it suggests the possibility
for healing through exploring creativity, of being always open to
the invitation of the Mystery — mystical, primitive, indigenous
and alive in all of us. In our root mythologies trees were
considered sacred because they span the three-part stage of the
cosmos on which life’s dance takes place, in the underworld, the
heavens and in the middle, on Mother Earth. With their roots in
the underworld and their branches in the heavens, shamans have
long known that trees allow ready access to these transformative
worlds and their healing and life-renewing energies.

All the quilts reclaim and proclaim my spirituality as woman
and mother in creative relationship with the Universe. They tap
into an intuitive, subliminal, soul connection with an ancient
heritage which saw Earth and Her creatures as an interdependent
family. For some, myself included, this growing awareness brings
personal power in the process of re-storying and re-visioning our
experiences of creation through our child-raising, our artistic
expression and our lives as ritual. The process is the constant
turning of the Wheel towards the Great Mother in all of us, She
who creates, nurtures and sustains life, dances with Her children
and receives them back into Her womb-tomb in endless cycles
of birth, death and rebirth.
A SELF BLESSING

Blessed be you
Who seeks the fullness of life
Through your searching, and
Holding of the cup in offering and
Imbibing.

You who stand in uncertainty accepting
Whilst taking another look;
Understanding whilst looking for
A deeper unveiling.

Blessed be you
Who trusts and loves
In the darkness of your growing —
For the wisdom and nurturance,
The protection of the ages of
Womankind
Is with you
THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The Wheel of the Year celebrates the larger cycles of life’s rites of passage as well as the seasonal cycles. In the southern hemisphere the wheel moves counter clockwise.

CONCEPTION & BIRTH
- peak of the dark — and birth of the light

DEATH
- opening to the mystery of the dark — initiation

TURNING WITHIN
- festivals celebrating the life-giving energies of the dark

ACCEPTING & GIVING UP
- festivals celebrating the growing light

MARRIAGE & CHILDREN
- at Spring Equinox the amount of light in a day starts to outweigh the dark

MATUREITY & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES
- at Autumn Equinox the balance tips and darkness gradually increases

YOUTH
- festivals celebrating the growing light

MATING
- festivals celebrating the growing light

BELTANE
- potential and balance

LUGHNASAD
- peak of the light — and birth of the dark

IMBOLC
- quickening at the increasing light

SAMHAIN
- reviewing and letting go

AUSTRALIA EQUINOX
- receiving and transforming

STERN:
- rejuvenation

MAYN:
- deligh in light and love

LATHA:
- peak of the light — and birth of the dark

SOLSTICE:
- opening to the mystery of the dark — initiation

JUNE 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

DECEMBER 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

FEBRUARY 2
- receiving and transforming

MARCH 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

APRIL 30
- reviewing and letting go

AUGUST 2
- quickening at the increasing light

SEPTMBER 20—23
- potential and balance

OCTOBER 31
- quickening at the increasing light

JUNE 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

DECEMBER 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

FEBRUARY 2
- receiving and transforming

MARCH 20—23
- reviewing and letting go

APRIL 30
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BETWEEN THE WORLDS
WOMEN EMPOWERING OURSELVES THROUGH RE-IMAGING OUR SPIRITUALITY AND CREATIVITY

ANNABELLE MADELEINE SOLOMON
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MASTER OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY (HONS)
FACULTY OF SOCIAL INQUIRY

UWS, HAWKESBURY

PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

To the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person, except to which due reference is made in the text is included in this report.

Neither this research nor this thesis have been submitted to any other University or Institution for the award of a higher degree.

A. M. Solomon
Winmalee,
2/9/98.
SYNOPSIS

The research question for this thesis arose from a desire to find ways to integrate into my sense of Self, my personal experience as woman and mother, and to be empowered by that. It became clear that I needed to find a source of empowerment that did not stem from the western system of social, religious and political organisation by control and domination; rather one that affirmed the life honouring, spiritual and ecological values that were being highlighted by my experience of mothering.

These values are taking on a new significance for those of us who are evolving an eco-spirituality based in a deepening understanding of our connection to the earth and to the process of creation. As spiritual feminists the connection is deepened further by the recognition of a time when these values were incorporated into the earliest of human creation stories, from watching the creative cycles of the greatest of mothers, the earth in her seasons, and the bodies of women in the gestating creation cycles. My research aimed to recover a worldview for myself which was empowering, by a recognition of the creative act of bringing new life as inherently our source of power as women.

The body which forms the presentation of this research thesis is in two media: the written text and the visual arts. It is expressed and interpreted in three parts: through the texts of the book, The Wheel of the Year: Seasons of the Soul in Quilts (Solomon 1997) and this research document, and through the visual medium of artquilts in exhibition (and also illustrated in the book) which symbolise the Old European and Celtic seasonal celebration.

The process for construction of this 'research quilt in three parts' has been to piece together the fabrics of two women's research groups' life experiences, and my own personal reflections on my life and theirs, through the creative processes of mothering, patchwork quilting, and participating in seasonal ritual. Each of these processes has been wholly integrated into my own life, and into the lives of the women with whom and through whom I have lived this.

It is hoped that the threads of connection and patterns between women's spiritual expression, our creativity as embodied and our search for an authentic sense of personal power can be seen woven into each part, forming an overall pattern.
THREE PART PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH THESIS
"BETWEEN THE WORLDS: WOMEN EMPOWERING OURSELVES THROUGH RE-IMAGING OUR SPIRITUALITY AND CREATIVITY"

1. “The Wheel of the Year” an exhibition of artquilts at Fibre Design Gallery and Studio, 9 Montague Street, Goulburn, NSW.


3. The Research Text.
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for the Research Text

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THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

SEASONS OF THE SOUL IN QUILTS

ANNABELLE SOLOMON

No. 88 in a limited edition of 100 copies

PENTACLE PRESS
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INSIDE FRONT COVER: This particular figurine made in clay is known as the Venus of Willendorf, c.30,000 BCE. Many thousands of similar figurines have been found in archaeological sites of the Palaeolithic Era throughout the area known as Old Europe, usually at the hearth, the focus of spiritual rites. She was Goddess: the giver of life and all that promotes fertility, as well as being the destructive force, the light and the dark — whole.

Screenprint by Suzanne Swanson
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I heard Thea Gaia say on the first day of the series of workshops on Women’s Spirituality which I attended in 1992 that books were her friends, I was bemused by the idea. I had never thought about books that way — recreational, instructional, tools of learning certainly, but never as friends. It sounded far too personal. Since then I have met many of Thea’s friends through their books, having conversations with them over the years. So often after finishing a particular book, I feel compelled to write to thank the authors for sharing their very particular and personal insights and knowledge with me. So, to Thea, for broadening my circle of friends and to the authors themselves, I am deeply grateful. They are catalyst to my own revelations.

I thank Thea Gaia for re-cognizing my dawning consciousness of a vision of wholeness for both myself and the planet and for her guidance and support in the writing of this book. Another Goddess friend and ritual celebrant, Glenys Livingstone, has been a source of inspiration as we journey in our own ways to experience and bring into consciousness those sacred moments when women and Goddess are one and the same. The women who over the past several years have been part of the ritual circle meeting to celebrate the festivals and moons have been ‘embodied’ soul friends, providing inspiration, learning and nurturance. I thank you all for your love and sharing.

ix
Without the initial encouragement from Laura Murray Cree I may not have recognized the challenge to my creative capacities in the visual arts, nor have taken on the task of writing this book. For the introduction to the world of creative expression through fabric and quilts, thanks to my initial teacher Sue Wademan, another woman in the wider circle whose life and work demonstrates the attributes of courage, wisdom and intelligence. I am grateful to Judy Pinn, my university supervisor, who supported the idea of my writing this book. My thanks to Patti Miller and Helen Barnes for editorial guidance, Carolynne Skinner and Donald MacLean for their contribution to the publishing process, and Janita and Mark Ayton for giving the book form. And to you all, thanks for your patience, flexibility and honesty, in a very intense and valuable learning process.

Through the expression of our creative energies as mothers and women, we are contributing in unique ways to the emergence of a new consciousness needed at this time. My sister Judi inspires me by her drive for social justice, profoundly sourced in a commitment to her daughter, Jean. I thank my son Leo, who is my source of inspiration and motivation, for being such a ‘good sport’ during the process of writing this book.

I dedicate the thoughts in this book to all women: those who create family, quilts, music, art and daily ritual; those who write and research; and those who share their stories verbally. Together we weave the magical web through which we both support and find support.

Annabelle Solomon
1997
The mystery is always of a body
The mystery is always of the body of a woman
...The mystery of the mystery is being woman
...the mystery is
always of the body in the body of a woman

Helen Cixous in Rachel Pollack's, The Body of the Goddess
INTRODUCTION

If someone had suggested to me three years ago that patchwork quilting would become my passion I most probably would have laughed with less than little enthusiasm, such would have been the degree of value I might have given to the suggestion. I do not remember the word ‘patchwork’ ever having crossed my lips and, if so it would not have been with much respect. If any impressions about patchwork quilting had in fact crossed my thought processes or entered my conversations, it would not be doing me any favour to reveal them here!

However, when planning the research process for a Master’s degree in the School of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney the suggestion did arise. My initial supervisor thought that patchwork quilting might be an appropriate medium by which to explore and express my topic. Having started with an interest in therapy and healing through the process of artistic expression, I expected that my research would take me down the track of psychology and psychotherapy using a feminist approach. An earlier course had brought up questions about the effectiveness of conventional medical ways of healing for women within a world dominated by male perspectives and values. I sensed the need for alternative approaches which give greater power to the female seeker.

The alternative ways of healing I wanted to explore were through the channels of what is loosely termed ‘women’s spirituality’, and creativity. I thought that by the recognition of ourselves as creators, primarily as mothers, and by the reclamation of our own spiritual heritage forged in aeons past by a deep connection with the primary creative energy of mothering, we could rekindle our inherent powers for healing, self and others.
The relevance of patchwork quilting seemed remote, aside from the fact that mostly women do it. I was taken by surprise at the suggestion and was somewhat less than enthusiastic, but since it is in my nature to consider all options I decided to give it a go. In tandem with reflections on my own life experience, my topic had been gestating for several years: the relationship between women’s spirituality, creativity and sense of personal power. It seemed to me to form the three sides of a triangle — one of the basic shapes used in the formation of patchwork blocks. When I started patchworking, I found that blocks and layouts took on all sorts of significance in the designing and planning of my research method and process, and sometimes in the final shapes of my quilts.

The stories which follow are the result of journeying into many different worlds, some seemingly far apart and remote: the worlds of academia and patchwork quilting, of psychology and spirituality, of politics and women, of priestess and mother. The stories are also told in pictures, the artquilts. The theme for the eight quilts and the corresponding chapters of this book is the seasonal cycles and festivals of the old pagan calendar. Each chapter explores the process of creation of the season’s quilt. They are creation stories told in textiles in the context of Annabelle, woman and mother, inheritor of the culture most commonly called western European, member of the sixth generation on the shores of Australia.

The quilts too are on a journey. They tell their own story. They stand alone to be viewed and responded to by others. For me this is the work of the artist. Not only to use form, line and colour, but to represent them in a way which elicits relationship, a conversation (the Latin stem of the word means a turning) on the level of soul, psyche, spirit — an interaction which results in reflection and re-formation. Just as a piece of the same fabric I have used in one of my quilts may be used by another woman in her quilt, my hope is that there will be pieces and patches, strands and threads, from my images and stories of the journey which
will be recognized by others, pieced together from their own experiences and retold in their own way.

**Spirituality**

From my perspective, spiritual journeys take a lifetime. Some might say they take many more than one earthly lifetime. And the expressions of spirituality may take many different forms in one lifetime. While some seem to lack association with any specific denomination they can nevertheless exert as much influence as a formal religious organisation.

In my life my spirituality has been manifest in many forms: in the context of the Catholic Church, inherited from the story-lines of my Irish mother’s immigrant family; five years as a nun in a religious order; in a temporary desire to convert to Judaism, the religion of my paternal ancestors; in associations with Zen Buddhism; and explored further, perhaps on a more secular level, through various programs for personal development. Along the way I found myself turning rather like a wheel, making tracks of meaning, coming into understanding and healing, becoming whole. I began to notice feeling more free to be who I am... and, better still, to trust who I am be-coming.

In coming to the stage of writing about my ideas on and experiences of the spiritual I was by coincidence reading Jean Shinoda Bolen’s book about a journey which crossed boundaries into ‘different worlds’, where she found worlds between the worlds. *Crossing to Avalon* (1994) tells of her mid-life pilgrimage, on the physical and the spiritual and personal levels. There were many synchronicities, or serendipities between my reading her story and what was actually happening in my life, not least of which was Bolen’s account of ambivalent feelings about revealing her personal story and the delays in completion she had experienced due to the intervention of child-raising and life.

The fact that she is a practising MD and psychoanalyst, and writes particularly about her soul journey from a woman’s perspective with its changing seasons gave me courage. She was using terms
and ideas which I had felt intuitively were appropriate ways to
describe my process, my soul journey into and with the Divine
Feminine, recorded in a journal during the process of making
the quilts.

One image I particularly liked was her description of women’s
spirituality as ‘the Woman that is in the heart of women’. (1) It
resonates strongly for me in the image of the little Venus of
Willendorf, as she is called, whose image I have used on the cover.
Such figurines have been found at archaeological sites in their
thousands over wide stretches of the European continent and
date back to 30,000 BCE. For me She is the Woman who is at the
hub of the Wheel, at the still point, the Woman in the heart of
women, the mother of us all, in us all, and Mother of All.

I also found myself agreeing with Bolen’s more general comments
on the experience of women in relation to spirituality: ‘Living
for at least five thousand years in cultures where there is no
Goddess, no reverence for childbearing and child rearing, where
dominating the earth and women is theologically sanctioned and
men demonstrate their manhood through war and other
equivalent rites of passage, any woman, no matter how personally
privileged, is spiritually oppressed. Under patriarchy, women
become alienated from women and from our own bodies. That
which makes us different from men makes us feel inferior and
ashamed, as does that which we do that men don’t accept.’ (2)

Bolen’s point is obviously made not only in reference to the
spiritual. It is intrinsically political, and reminded me of a book
of edited essays which I had read when first setting out on my
pilgrimage into Self, entitled The Politics of Women’s Spirituality.
The treating of two such apparently disparate disciplines, politics
and spirituality, as connected struck me at first as quite
incongruous. (3)

I now see no contradiction in living as a spiritual feminist. I have
also known for many years of the feminist adage that the personal
is the political, inspiring women to heal deep and often
subconscious wounds by telling our stories in our own ways. Shinoda Bolen calls these stories 'revelation', and it is in the spirit of the closing quotation of Crossing to Avalon that I offer the stories arising out of my journey in the following pages...

'The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away when they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.' I might add that sometimes a person needs to tell a story more than food to stay alive. (4)

**The Wheel of the Year**

The title of the series of quilts created during my research is "The Wheel of the Year", a title borrowed from the old western European and probably most basic human understanding of the cosmos — that the seasons, the stars, our lives, transpire in cycles. Surely the primary and most essential relationship experienced by our human ancestors, evident to us in such events as the seasonal migration of animals and birds, was the relationship with the environment.

How often do we refer in some way to our physical environment, especially the weather, after greeting a friend, after an introduction? At the bus-stop, or to passing neighbours, remarks about the weather create connection. We sometimes joke about these attempts at conversation, calling them puerile and meaningless. But my guess is that such a simple social custom was once endowed with ritual significance, laden with meaning for the welfare of soul and body — for the relationships between tribal members, their environment, and their goddesses and gods. It is that cyclical relationship which for me gives form and meaning to what I call the sacred, the numinous, or simply, the spiritual.

Our human forbears held ritual celebrations arising out of their deep connection to the land, the Great Mother who nurtured them, and the changing seasons which symbolically marked the times of passage in the life of the tribe. Four of these demarcations
must have resulted from generations of observation of the night skies, and the position of the sun at various times of the cycle. They are the seasons of Equinox, autumn and spring, and of Solstice, winter and summer, festivals of balance and tipping the balance. At the Equinoxes the hours of darkness and light, of night and day are in the balance. At the Solstices the zenith and nadir, the periods of greatest and least dark and light, are held for a moment then tip into the slow procession towards balance at the Equinoxes, and on toward their opposite inclination, to either decrease or increase.

There are four other major festivals which dissect the wheel at crossquarters. These are known as the Crossquarter Days. They too are holy days of high celebration. They mark both the rites of passage between the worlds — by honouring the dead at Hallowe’en and revelling in life and love at Beltane, and the change-over between dark and light — by welcoming the growing light at Candlemas, and harvesting the crops in preparation for the growing dark at Lammas. On these festivals too the balance is held, and the four stages of the Wheel of Life honoured: life, decay, death, rebirth. The festivals of the old pagan (meaning people who lived in the countryside) and Celtic religions are still remnant in such Christian holidays as Christmas (Winter Solstice) and Easter (Spring Equinox), All Souls’ Day (Hallowe’en) and May Day (Beltane) and the feast of St. Brigid (Candlemas).

Thus the two Equinoxes, the two Solstices and the four festivals together create the eight spokes of the Wheel of the Year, and are represented by the eight quilts in this book. There are two names for each festival at the head of each chapter: the first is the more recent Christianised version, and the second uses the old Celtic name. Dates are also given at the head of each chapter. Equinoxes and Solstices are variable, within four days. Two of the Crossquarter Days, Samhain and Beltane, are celebrated on the night of the date shown. Both Lammas and Candlemas can be day-long celebrations which usually go on into the night.
Creativity

I found that working with cloth was like coming home. As a medium for creative self-expression it felt comfortable and accessible without the need for formal training. I had used fabric and sewing machine for many years to make clothes. But this process was different again: the avenue of creativity was widening out, and trees along its pathways were blossoming! I was beginning to get a feeling for the appropriateness of using patchwork quilting as the medium for my thesis.

Starting with traditional blocks (5) known generically as log cabin, the variable star and snail trail, it didn't take long before I was wanting to experiment — test the rules really. I had already started to do so with colour by trying out combinations for various effects, to suit mood rather than using the more traditional guidelines for colour of complimentarity or tonal contrasts.

The desire to work to the theme of the seasonal cycles of nature and psyche encouraged me to look for my own designs. I also wanted to work on each season in season. In making the Summer Solstice quilt, for example, I was physically aware of the sun's enormous energy, warmth and generosity as central star of our galaxy. I chose some fabrics for their connection either by colour or pattern with the season of summer. Over the summer months we feel the sun's heat diffused through the clear and strong blue expanse of the Australian skies. By joining four orange and yellow snail trail blocks, a central motif emerged which gave the effect of swirling and blazing energy. Four pinwheel blocks made in an earlier experimentation enhanced the feeling of energy at the four corners. The Summer Solstice quilt took shape out of the fabrics on hand, leftover blocks and feeling the heat. So began a long love affair with quilting.

I didn't know at the time that the little quilt I had produced followed the layout of the traditional medallion style quilt, being a central square containing a motif bordered equally on all four sides. It seemed that the various aspects of learning about block
formation, colour juxtaposition, placement of blocks, even
decisions about size and final shape of the finished piece were
happening quite smoothly and organically within the context
defined by my research question. And I was finding an
authenticity I had not felt before. I literally felt the spark of my
creative energies take fire and a great passion inspiring me.

I continued to work intuitively with technique, design and colour,
using the ‘feel’ of the season or festival to direct my choices.
Sometimes I played randomly with colour combinations in the
blocks I was building, finding that the number and colours of
the blocks I had produced played a large role in the design of the
final piece. There seemed to be weblike connections between
technique, randomness and theme: teaching myself or learning
more about a specific technique, risking outcome by ‘letting go’,
and always in the background holding it all together and giving
meaning to the search was the research topic women’s spirituality,
creativity and power.

**Power and Empowerment**

It was all starting to make sense — the connection between my
spiritual journey, my interest in healing and empowerment, my
uncompromising admiration for women (greatly enhanced since
becoming a mother) and patchwork quilting. In my eagerness to
try to understand how things got to be the way they are,
particularly for me as woman in twentieth century western
European society, I read stories from and about the past retold
by women of today. They showed how ancient myths had often
been revised to suit particular political viewpoints.

Reading these women’s versions of the story gave me an inkling
of the subtle and gradual changes in the power base, from the
more egalitarian, life honouring and cooperative societies of pre-
recorded history to our patriarchal era. They also pointed to a
different understanding of the nature of power, to a time when
power may have been considered to arise from within, rather
than being bestowed from above — when its purpose was in the
service of the community and the earth, the Great Mother, rather than for personal aggrandizement. (6)

One of the early women writers on women’s spirituality, Merlin Stone, said that theology is ultimately political. It is these theological and political viewpoints which inform all stories, all art, all revolving belief systems. It seems to me that they form a circle, are born in relationship: the relationship between humans and our environment, between women and men, and between the human and the divine, the Ultimate Mystery most often expressed in stories about our goddesses and gods. Far from being played out on different stages, I started to see the intrinsic connection between the invisible and the visible, between my spirituality as a woman and my personal power as expressed through the quilts.

I felt as though my identity as a woman had been turned around by half a circle, one hundred and eighty degrees. I had been told and was hearing the other side of the story. To integrate it into my own life story I created the quilts. I wanted them to tell my story, which begins something like... ‘When God was a Woman, all people held in sacred respect their deep connection to the Mother Earth, who nourishes and gives shelter, who takes them back into Her body at death to await new life. The people affirmed the Mysteries in story and song, in ritual and by means of symbols painted on caves and on their bodies. They fashioned Her image in clay and wove cloth to reflect their connection to the Mysteries.’ (7)

Symbols as Her-itage...

Symbols — be they expressed in picture form or in story — are inner landscapes expressed outwardly. They are also mirrors — reflectors of the outer landscape. The stories, histories, propagandas, conversations and images we live with are as important to our formation and growth in harmony with the life force of the planet as are the elements of earth, air, fire and water which combine to give us form and spirit. All create our sense of who we are in the world.
It is through the process of creating the quilts that I started to look more closely at my own inner landscape from an entirely new perspective, one which seemed to offer me the vantage point. It somehow felt more familiar, more authentic, registering more consciously in my body also. My vision for the quilts is that as both symbols and symptoms they awaken a sense of the Ultimate Mysteries, of our connection with and dependence on the ways of the Mother (or however you may image the life-giving energy), with each other and with our goddesses and gods, the metaphors we trust to hold and through which we tell our storylines of relationships.

The constant temptation to embellish my commentary about the quilts with snippets I have gleaned from reading stories of our long heritage, in order to weave the threads of connection and cut others, has been difficult to resist. I find the same thing with a quilt: when to stop, when is it finished? Some expansion of ideas can be found in the Notes at the end of each chapter. I have also included a list of books which I have read and referred to during the time of making the quilts and which have influenced the evolution of my current worldview.

Art as Living Ritual as Art

In autumn I watch the leaves turn orange and red. With my son Leo I wade through the crackly, brown carpet. The red and orange berries brighten gardens and roadsides in the darkest month of winter, and when I see the first spray of pale wattle emerge I already start to look forward to the spring. Earth offers Her reminders.

Whilst I write directly about each quilt and the universal and mythological significances which arose for me in the process of making it, each chapter starts with thoughts on the season, the signs about us in nature, the relation between dark and light, which are also metaphors for the mini-cycles we experience in our lives and feel in our souls.
A patchwork quilt tells a thousand stories. The pieces of fabric which give it form may have been passed on by a particular friend, come from an old school dress, or in the case of early Australian quilts known as Waggas, been made from samples bought from the travelling cloth salesman. As markers of life’s passages, quilts are testimonials to the greater phases of the life and death cycle. A quilt may have been worked to celebrate a wedding, a life time of friendship for a fortieth birthday, the birth of a new baby, or to keep the knees of an elderly aunt warm. The world is familiar with the commemorative and communal quilts from those families and friends affected by AIDS. I am aware of a quilt-making project which recognizes the need for healing and to promote reconciliation between the original and non-indigenous peoples of Australia. (8)

Although many of the symbols in my quilts have a more universal significance, the myths and stories I refer to derive from the ancient roots of my peoples, those indigenous to Europe and the Middle East, those peoples from whom the Judaeo-Christian tradition evolved. As a relative and dispossessed newcomer to this great land in the south, I have felt the need to educate myself from the roots of my own tradition, and thereby to find the springs of understanding and compassion at the well and in the cave of my own ancestral experience. This in turn makes space for wider understanding in the context of my present life.

**Going Half-Circle to Make a Full Circle**

Books which contain ideas for ritual celebrations and patchwork journals often come from the northern hemisphere, where the seasons are reversed. By turning the wheel a full half-circle it becomes more like home. At the back of the book I have included a diagrammatic rendition (page 105) of the ideas in the following chapters, which reads anticlockwise and gives dates and seasons appropriate to the southern hemisphere.

A practical and creative way to re-orient yourself is to draw up — or stitch up — your own Wheel of the Year. Divide a circle into
four main quarters, and then into the eight sections formed by the four crossquarters. It looks like the eight wedges of a pie. Now use whatever materials you like to fill in the various sections with colours and symbols, embellishments which remind you of each season or festival. Around the rim you could write or stitch the months of the year and the name of the festivals. You might like to make some distinction between those four festivals, beginning at each of the Solstices, which mark the passage of the dark half of the year, and those which remember the coming of the light.

Amongst the symbols from which I have found sacred meaning, the most evocative of Ultimate Mystery is the circle. It appeals to the mystic in me. To talk about beginnings and endings is also to know that the circle has no beginning and no end. To seek alternately change and constancy is to recognize that the circle is ever-changing yet remains the same. To feel the need at times to break the cycle, or to keep it going, is to know that the circle is never broken and always open. (9)

We often sit in a circle as we make our quilts, sharing stories and experiences. There is a safety and a communion. And we sit in a circle to do ritual, to re-member as a group, to re-form the Self as the seasons turn, or as the moon waxes and wanes, to re-spect and re-view ourselves in the turning of the Wheel in sacred space.

Inner landscapes have their own cyclical seasons reflected in the external world. The expression of inner seasons affects the way the outer landscape shows up, and how it will in turn react. I feel that through my quilts I am becoming more authentically who I am, healing unknown wounds and becoming ‘whole’, being ‘true to myself’ by learning to know myself in a way that will be of benefit to the outer landscape. I am re-calling the power to Self-author, call my Self into being, so that my inner world grows in harmony with the outer expression.

In this dance of creation the quilts are a living ritual and are reminders to me of the life-giving Mystery, honoured from earliest
times for the comfort, blessings and lessons which each season of change brings, both to outer and inner landscapes.

As the seasons change, I hang the quilts in my home in memory of the sacred Wheel of the Year, which comes and goes. My hope is that the quilts will journey far and wide, cross boundaries into the many different worlds we all inhabit, strike chords of resonance, and find new homes. I feel that as the Wheel of the Seasons turns so too will my quilts turn, return and evolve as my personal on-going ritual expression in the dance of creation.

Blessed be!
Notes for the Introduction

1 Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 1994: 238. Many women writers are telling their soul stories; some are listed in the Further Reading.

2 Ibid: 267

3 Charlene Spretnak edited *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality* in 1982. It covers a very broad spectrum of spiritual issues on various paths within the context of the feminist movement.


5 In the terminology of patchwork a block is the basic unit of joined pieces of fabric which is recreated many times, albeit with colour variations, and when sewn together with several other blocks forms the pattern which repeats. Some basic block units are known as a four patch or nine patch. Others are given more fanciful names.

6 Amongst other writers, Starhawk and Riane Eisler are developing alternative perspectives on the notion of power. Drawing from archaeological evidence of its application within the domain of daily life, they thereby give it a political edge which removes the perceived need for dominance (power over), offering partnership as an alternative.

7 Merlin Stone is one of the first women of the seventies feminist movement to address the significance of the gender of the divine. The first edition of her book, *When God Was A Woman*, now a classic in women’s spirituality studies, was not allowed to be published under that title, and was called *The Paradise Papers*.

8 This project is an independent initiative by a small group of individuals in the Blue Mountains to raise awareness, funds and ‘provide the opportunity of contributing to Reconciliation in a creative way’.

9 At the end of a ritual circle it is customary to open the circle with the following verse:

   *May the circle be open, but unbroken*
   *May the peace of the Goddess be ever in your hearts.*
   *Merry meet and merry part, and merry meet again.*
That beginnings and endings meet is the great law and mystery, the circle and spiral of women's spirituality and the goddess.

Diane Stein, The Women's Spirituality Book