

Green Consciousness:
Earth-Based Myth and Meaning in *Shrek*
By Jane Caputi

According to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a report compiled by 1,300 leading scientists from 95 countries, pollution and exploitative practices are damaging the planet at a rapid rate and to the point that the “ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted” (Conner 2004). The planet, in response to this abuse, will no longer be so readily providing such “services” as purification of air and water, protection from natural disasters, and the provision of foods and medicines. While practices of the richest nations, greedy for excess energy, food, water, and raw materials, are at the root of the problem, it is the poor who suffer and will continue to suffer the worst effects. The study urges drastic and immediate changes in consumption, an emphasis on local regulation of resources, better education, new technology and higher costs to be borne by those who exploit ecosystems.

This state of crisis is as much an emotional and spiritual as it is a material one (Gottlieb 2004b, 12). Underlying the need for these concrete changes is an equally dire one for a sweeping transformation of consciousness for those who habitually pollute and exploit. In response to this environmental emergency we can trace the continuing emergence of a *Green consciousness*, an ecological consciousness that diverges widely from the mainstream conceptions that have allowed environmental devastations as an inevitable part of human progress. Green consciousness is not a wholly new worldview, but one that is based in many ancient and still current principles and wisdoms, many of which are elaborated in oral traditions as well as environmentalist and feminist philosophy, nature writing, fiction, poetry, art, song lyrics and music.¹ Green consciousness is a holistic worldview, and one that offers alternative conceptions of human and non-human subjectivity, of humans' relationships with each other and with non-human nature. And Green consciousness is not a totally unfamiliar worldview, even to those of us in the industrialized West who have little familiarity with environmentalism, for its principles continue to pervade our popular culture, including such popular recent films as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix*, and *Shrek*. My focus here will be on *Shrek*, but before turning to a direct discussion of the film, I would like to first sketch out some of the core precepts of Green consciousness.

Much of Green consciousness is allied with feminist critiques of the historical social structure known as *patriarchy*,² and its paradigmatic orientation, what Susan Griffin (1989) has characterized as a “split culture” and Val Plumwood (1993) as a “master” consciousness. Master consciousness understands *power* not as capacity or potential but as power over/ domination; it imposes (and then naturalizes) oppressive hierarchies – of sex, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on. This type of power is predicated upon a core splitting apart of what are underlying unities, including masculine from feminine, subject from “other,” human from animal, order from chaos, sex from spirit, mind from body, humanity from nature, and life from death. These psychical fissionings are, in their way, as destructive as the splitting of atoms. For example, the schisming that makes a “master” separate from and dominant over a “slave” denies the underlying interconnection and dependence of all life. The “master” presumes, wrongly, that one can lord it over others without ultimately debasing oneself, that one can pollute, exploit or dump on others, including human and non-human others, without also ultimately polluting, exploiting or objectifying oneself (Plumwood 1993).

In the overall splitting that characterizes master consciousness, men are aligned with culture/order and women with nature/chaos, and nature is understood as something that must be mastered, tamed, controlled. Concomitantly, elite groups deem those they subjugate to be “closer to nature,” more savage, less civilized. Those “savages,” like the non-human world itself, are subjected to abuse and the exploitation of their “services.” They are enslaved, often literally. Women, of all classes, much like the Earth, are expected to provide generative, sexual, caretaking and nurturing services on demand and for free. The word *service*, which appeared so prominently in the Millennium Ecosystem Report, significantly, derives from the Latin *servus*, meaning slave.

Green consciousness proposes another model altogether. First of all, it recognizes that there are “vast forces not of man’s making that shape and channel the nature and direction of life” (Carson 1998, 193). Such forces cannot be enslaved. The services these forces provide are neither controllable nor “free,” but are contingent upon human respect and reciprocity. Numerous ancient and still vibrant world traditions guide humans to “give back” to the Earth, to honor necessary obligations to the Earth and nature. It is our responsibility to nurture the Earth and the elemental, and to feed and serve what we can understand as the Green, the life force, as it feeds and serves us. We do this with responsible ordering of our interactions with non-human nature, as well as by offering praise, song,

dance and prayer, which we can understand as *energetic* communication with the life force. We also give back through our simple life processes, including sexual exuberance as well as excretion, respiration and final expiration through which we feed the primal source, for example, by replenishing the soil as our waste as our bodies decompose.³

Green consciousness understands, again along with Rachel Carson (1993, 193), that all of life is a “unified force.” Green consciousness raises awareness of the profound consequences of each and every action due to the underlying inter-relatedness of all that exists. Buddhist thinker Thich Nhat Hanh (1988, 3-5) suggests that we recognize not only our individual being but also the reality of our *inter-being* with all of life, past, present and future. As such Green consciousness turns us away from domination and toward relationships of sustainable and loving reciprocity. Carson simultaneously reminds us that the unified force of life is “composed of an infinite number and variety of separate lives.” To diminish that variety is a grave error. Monocultures are antithetical to life. Diversity, biological and cultural, is one of the greatest gifts of the Earth (Bagehmihl 1999; Shiva 1997).

Green consciousness displaces elite human beings from a self-appointed place at the top of a hierarchy that posits some other humans and all other life forms as less valuable. Master consciousness would have us believe that humanity (often a code word for the privileged) possesses “some divinely mandated dominion over all creation” and thereby owns “all living things, along with the very earth, air, and water in which they live” (Carroll, 1999). Green consciousness understands that women and men and all types of humans are equally natural and naturally equal, and that all generate culture. Furthermore, while master consciousness holds that only humans are ensouled and conscious, the Green worldview recognizes consciousness as an attribute of all beings, not just human beings.

Green consciousness refuses the master culture’s habitual and hierarchical mind/body split (Bordo 1993). It recognizes that consciousness is sourced in and shaped by biology (Sjöö and Mor 1991, 423; Finch, 2004). It understands nature as a generative, creative principle that encompasses *all* of the life force, including death (Plumwood 1993). It proposes not only that natural death is not evil, but that people, bodies and sexualities (including non-procreative sexualities) are basically intelligent and good, not originally sinful or in need of control (Caputi 2005b).

Many of us think of popular culture as, at best, mere entertainment and, at worst, the source of negative stereotypes and crass commercialism in support of the status quo. To be sure, much popular culture fits this bill. But some popular culture continues to serve as a continuation of ancient and/or

alternative oral traditions, including these principles of Green consciousness. Some instances of popular culture (including, particularly, some horror, science fiction, and children's stories) continue to transmit ways of knowing and being, including Green ways of knowing and being that have been officially discredited, trivialized and forgotten. *Popular*, after all, comes from a Latin word meaning *people*. A most valuable index to what people commonly know, value, fear, remember and believe can be found there. Oddly enough, it also is a place where things usually unspoken, things that go against established canons, can be spoken, albeit usually symbolically (Caputi 2004).

The Story

If there were Druids whose temples were the oak groves, my temple is the swamp.

Henry David Thoreau (cited in Hurd 2001, unpagged epigraph)

The symbolically resonant story of *Shrek* concerns a large green, swamp-dwelling ogre, whose unique personality is as capacious as his frame. The film opens as Shrek ruminates in his outhouse, reading a fairy tale: "Once upon a time, there was a lovely princess. But she had an enchantment upon her of a fearful sort which could only be broken by love's first kiss. She was locked away in a castle guarded by a terrible fire-breathing dragon. Many brave knights had attempted to free her from this dreadful prison, but none prevailed. She waited in the dragon's keep, in the highest room of the tallest tower, for her true love, and true love's first kiss." Shrek scoffs at the romanticism of the tale and cynically tears off a page to use as toilet paper. Next, we see Shrek enjoying a mud bath, issuing a few farts into the ooze, and savoring a meal and a martini in his exceptionally cozy cottage in the base of a tree. Right away, we are led to realize that Shrek is at home in his body, comfortable with those features of the body (e.g., defecation) and the Earth (the swampy, muddy wetlands) that too often elicit only shame, suspicion, disdain and distancing from the "master" culture. Due to humanity's misplaced fears, and Shrek's own fears of his feelings, Shrek has become isolated in his swampland home. Lonely and somewhat embittered, he is emotionally immature and has no relationships with others.

Shrek's existence is about to be mightily disrupted. The local tyrant, Lord Farquaad, lives atop a risibly phallic tower and keeps his would-be kingdom in rule-bound tidiness, physical as well as psychical. To this end, he adopts a strategy of ethnic cleansing, rounding up all the fairy tale beings and dumping them all in the swamp, much to Shrek's chagrin. One of these

beings, a talking donkey, is not so much like a fairy tale character as he is like the central figure in the second-century novel *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius (1994) (a devotee of the Green Goddess Isis). Donkey persists in accompanying Shrek, first as an unwelcome sidekick and later an essential friend. The cowardly and conniving Farquaad tells Shrek that he can have the swamp back for himself if he goes and rescues a princess for him (the one from the fairy tale Shrek was reading in the outhouse). Farquaad's only interest in the Princess is to possess her – as a sexual object and as something to enhance his status. This red-haired Princess Fiona, resplendent in a verdant dress, is guarded by a fire-breathing dragon—a female dragon who falls in love with Donkey while he and Shrek manage to escape with the Princess. Fiona at first thinks Shrek, disguised by a helmet, is her knight but he reveals himself as an ogre and tells her that his job is only to transport her to Farquaad. Fiona at first seems to be a fairly standard issue feminine-type, but soon shows that she has a great deal of fire, spunk and strength.

And this princess is keeping a powerful secret. At night she turns into a green-skinned ogre, the hidden source of her potency but, due to conventional expectations, also a cause of shame. Fiona has always known that the first kiss of her true love will restore her to her true form, so she figures that Farquaad can solve her dilemma and make her a pretty princess for the rest of her life. On the journey to his tower, she and Shrek fall in love but the usual misunderstandings ensue. They separate as she is met by a party of Farquaad's men and she goes off with them to prepare for the wedding. Still, love does triumph. Dragon finds Donkey, who realizes that he is as smitten with her as she with him. The two gather up Shrek and set out atop the flying Dragon to stop the Princess from marrying Farquaad. As they disrupt the proceedings, the sun sets, and the Princess turns into her ogre self. Farquaad is disgusted, but Dragon continues to save the day by simply swallowing Farquaad. As Shrek and Fiona share her first kiss of true love, she is swept into the air and covered with a cloud. Viewers anticipate her transformation back into the pretty princess. But instead she emerges as her ogre self. Fiona is at first flabbergasted but then realizes how wonderful this is as Shrek tells her that he finds her beautiful. The film ends with their wedding, a fabulous song and dance party. All the fairy tale beings cavort with Shrek, Fiona, Donkey and Dragon in the swampland. Donkey takes center stage and sings, "I'm a Believer."

Shrek, however delightful and comic, also can be appreciated, through the lens of Green consciousness, as a contemporary re-telling of ancient chthonic or earth-based myth, specifically around its imagination of

greenness, its respect for the feminine principle and Goddess traditions, its refusal of hierarchy and split consciousness, its endorsement of the happy body and communal ecstasy, and its ringing celebration of diversity. Let's begin with its imaginative transmission of ancient, and contemporary, understandings of the power of the Green.

Greening Power

The Green can best be described as a transcendent state of harmony with all of nature in which the "knower" is united with the "known." The energy of all living vegetation forms the Green, which extends as far as plant life reaches. It is a restorative, healing place where there is compassion and love for all. One who enters the Green feels he is slipping into a cool and comfortable place where all cares dissolve into the safe and nurturing bosom of the Mother of All Life.

Daniel Greenberg (1992, 125), *Magic*

Shrek and the Princess (in both of her manifestations) are gloriously green, sharing in a tradition of popular culture characters, including Poison Ivy of the Batman series as well as the *Star Wars* series' Yoda, and all the other "little green men," of science fiction. There is also, of course, the iconic green Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, the animal-rights and anti-fascist hero of John Maguire's (1995) Oz-based revisionist novel *Wicked*. The quote with which I open this section is from a DC comics publication, which provides background information about the concepts and characters in "the DC universe." Although comic books are not generally regarded as an important contributor to theological discourse, the qualities ascribed to "The Green" reflect an ancient understanding linking greenness with the sacredness of nature and with a mystical awareness of the consciousness that encompasses all life and all beings, one that refuses an epistemology based upon domination and oppositional objectification, but, instead, unites the "knower with the known."

Nowadays, *green* is the color most commonly associated with ecological concerns, but its symbolic associations extend much farther back in world mythology and mystical traditions. Typically, green is the sacred symbol of nature, of growing things and of life itself. In ancient Egypt, "to do 'green things' was a euphemism for positive, life-producing behavior" (Wilkinson 1994, 108). The color green was associated with the Goddesses Hathor and Isis; Isis was known as the "'Queen of Earth', the 'Green Goddess, whose green color is like unto the greenness of the earth', 'Creator of green things'" (Baring and Cashford 1991, 237). She and her brother Osiris frequently appeared with green visage and skin tone. *Wadjet*, "the

green one,” was the name of the protective serpent Goddess of Lower Egypt (Wilkinson 1994, 108). Similar divine figures include the European pagan Green Goddess and Green Man, the Greek Demeter (“the green one”) and Persephone, the Aztec Xochiquetzal, Hindu’s Green Vishnu, Buddhism’s Green Tara, and Gauguin’s image of the Green Christ – all of whom represent cosmic energy/matter, resulting in the regenerative cycle of nature, birth, sustenance, life, death, transformation and rebirth or resurrection. A mystical vision of the Green as the elemental and divine life force, the spirit of nature and of the land, also prevails throughout common world folk, poetic, and popular traditions. Green is the color most associated with fairies (Briggs 1976, 108), who also wear a red cap (rather like the red-haired and green-dressed Fiona). There also are green leprechauns, green sea nymphs, elves and gnomes, foundling green children (Briggs 1976, 200-01), and green giants. In numerous traditional images, as in a window at Chartres Cathedral where he has green skin and huge green eyes (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, 455), Satan himself is green and even grassy. This motif (like his horns and tail) indicates his origins as a nature deity.

Islamic cultures have a legendary figure, Khizr, the Green Man, who represents the mean in human relations, midway between the High and the Low (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, 452), suggesting an alternative to oppositional consciousness. A distinctive spiritual tradition associating divinity with the Green also can be found in Catholicism in the work of the 12th century mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1985), who spoke of greening power, which she called *viriditas* (from the Latin), as a principle of divinity manifesting in nature. *Viriditas* is the source of fruitfulness, moistness and growth. Hildegard’s theology refused the splitting characteristic of master consciousness. As Beverly Lomer argues: “For Hildegard, Viriditas was the ultimate expression of sacred fertility, and it abrogates the dualism between the spiritual and the natural/fecund/Earth/feminine . . . most clearly manifested through the divine motherhood of Mary” (762). Significantly Hildegard consistently spoke of the Virgin Mary in ways that recalled the ancient traditions of Earth, nature, and Goddess worship, calling Mary the “greenest branch” and the “author of life” (Lomer 2005)

And, as I will take up in more detail later in this essay, while green is the color of living things, life, hope, strength and longevity, it simultaneously is the color also of slime, putrefaction, disease, death, and decay. This is because this mystical understanding of the Green is grounded in a chthonian or earth mythos, and thus, ineluctably, has an ambivalent character, a complementary, not an oppositional, dualism (Geffcken 1926, 573). Green symbolizes both life and death because these are the two

necessary and inter-related sides of earthly existence. Perhaps the most essential feature of Green consciousness is the acceptance of death as a part of life.

The Happy Body

A society based in body hate destroys itself and causes harm to all of Grandmother's grandchildren.

Paula Gunn Allen (1990, 53)

The film *Shrek* is based upon a children's picture book by *New Yorker* cartoonist William Steig (1990), who began writing and illustrating children's books at the age of 60. Steig's work, purportedly for children, but really for all of us, features the common themes of finding happiness through "romantic love, friendship, creativity, and a feeling of oneness with nature" (*Newsday*, 1984). Steig describes the philosophy underlying his work as being that "people are basically good and beautiful, and that neurosis is the biggest obstacle to peace and happiness" (*Newsday* 1984). Jonathon Cott discerns that in Steig's characterizations, "a happy consciousness is a function of a happy body and incapable of existing independently of a fulfilled sense of life" (cited in *Newsday* 1984).

In numerous interviews, Steig reveals that he bases much of his philosophy on the thought of his friend and doctor, Wilhelm Reich, the radical psychoanalyst who believed that a happy consciousness is a function of a happy body and a free sexuality. Throughout *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and other works, Reich (1970) argued that there were profound connections between spiritual and sexual repressions and political oppression and that it was through such repressions that people in Western civilization were conditioned to unquestioningly follow authoritarian, sadistic and genocidal regimes.⁴

The unhappy body is the result of the mind/body splitting that characterizes master consciousness. In this paradigm, that which is *not* body – mind, soul, spirit, or will – is seen as the true self, closest to "God," the most high and noble aspect of humanity. Concomitantly, the body is rendered as the most low, a source of shame, a troubling reminder of our supposedly gross and dirty animal, Earthy (and even Satanic) natures, and a source of appetites that can defeat our triumph-seeking will (Bordo 1993). Body-negative messages are communicated to us in a great variety of ways: religions that present the flesh as the antithesis of spirit and as the source of sin and cause of shame; the consumerist culture where human appetites and desires are distorted and manipulated for profit; racism, which falsely adores some bodies and just as falsely negates others; and sexism, which creates

unrealistic beauty standards for women based in youth, slenderness, and willingness to conform. Fear, denial and denigration of the body profoundly influence not only individual unhappiness but provide a conceptual basis for oppression as stigmatized groups (e.g., women, dark-skinned people) regularly are associated with the “grossities” of matter -- dirt, sex, elimination, and death (Dworkin 1987, 173). In the same way, body-loathing leads to environmental devastation. For Earth and the elements are the source of our bodies, the original matter; dirt is our very substance (Caputi, 2005a). The word *human* is from the Latin *humus*, meaning earth or dirt. In the words of Paula Gunn Allen (1990, 56), our body is our “most precious talisman” connecting us to the Earth.

The large and chubby Shrek is immediately and obviously associated with the happy body. *Shrek* has become such a beloved popular phenomenon because the film’s narrative so clearly recognizes and reveres those loveable and enjoyable aspects of ourselves that our culture rejects, deeming them ugly and fearsome. (The word *Shrek* means *monster* in Yiddish and is related to concepts of terror and fear.) The cumulative cultural opprobrium causes us to hide, isolate, and repress those aspects of our being that are pejoratively understood as our “natural” selves. In a society that tries (futilely) to conquer nature, disciplines the body, demands uniformity, and worships speed, transcendence, order and immortality, Shrek, the natural, one-of-a-kind, ambling and very round self, ends up being lonely indeed.

The site of Shrek’s home is most significant. It is a swamp, a wetland, that part of the ecosystem where water remains at the surface of the land. Wetlands so frequently are drained, filled in and paved over to allow human commerce and habitation. But in so doing, humans destroy one of nature’s most precious places. Though they might be smelly, thick with growth, and moist (rather like some tabooed parts of our bodies), swamps are necessary, providing habitat for the most beautiful birds and creatures as well as spawning and fishing grounds. Wetlands act as natural sponges, soaking up excess water from storms and preventing catastrophic flooding.⁵ And wetlands provide those essential natural *services* of providing and filtering water, prevention of soil erosion, and preservation of biological diversity. But we don’t always properly value them because swamps epitomize “the low” in a world that worships “the high.” Wetlands, moreover, are “marginal” spaces (Hurd 2001, 5) in a world that prefers tidy categories; they are both land and water, edgy places of obvious decay and renewal where things “are often on the brink of becoming something else,” where things don’t always “fit the current definitions of normal” (7), where

borders become blurry and what at first seems separate soon seems to be one. Swamps, Barbara Hurd further suggests, are analogous to the half-waking, half-sleeping hypnagogic state, “a time rich in [the] dreams and fantasy” (11) that profoundly nourish and express our imaginations.

Shrek’s swamp is vividly contrasted with the egotistical Lord Farquaad’s supposedly perfect, really sterile, city, from which he bans all the fairy tale beings. These beings provide fodder for much of the film’s humor, but that is not their only function in the story. They symbolize what truly is magic – imagination, wonder, and the creative process itself -all that is repressed and blocked by the patriarchal moralistic, the repressive and the authoritarian (Sjöö and Mor 1991, 427).

As many of their scholars and interpreters have noted, fairy tales have long been a primary source of Green or Earth-based wisdom traditions. Folklore scholar Harold Bayley (1996, I, 190) avers that ancient fairy tales themselves issued “from the soil.” Key features of these tales (Zipes 1999, 5) include not only the powers of the imagination, but also the efficacy of a good heart, the ensoullment, consciousness, and intelligence of all creatures (animals speak in fairy tales), the need for humans to maintain respectful relations with creatures, reverence for nature and an honoring of the ability to recognize and read its wondrous signs despite lack of social power, wealth or formal education. Fairy tales encourage belief in the miraculous processes of life, luck and transformation. They teach that we can actualize “possibilities for overcoming the obstacles that prevent other characters or creatures from living in a peaceful and pleasurable way” (Zipes 1999, 6) and suggest that we truly can live, as the saying goes, “happily ever after.” Although the isolated, alienated, and, in some ways, abusive⁶ Shrek starts off rejecting the fairy tale, he ultimately himself becomes a participant in one, achieving his own transformation and subsequent happy ending.

Key to his emotional rescue is his friendship with Donkey, the talking ass. Shrek, voiced by Mike Myers, has a Scottish accent. Donkey, voiced by Eddie Murphy, has an unmistakably African-American style of speech. This conventional pairing of white hero and darker sidekick is a problematic aspect of *Shrek*. First of all, the pairing is a common one reflecting racial hierarchies. Moreover, Donkey (who apparently has no other name)⁷ is characterized in ways that draw upon some stereotypic “coon” associations (Pilgrim, 2000) -- the African-American man as a figure of comic relief, one who is vulgar, shiftless, cowardly, and dominated by women. These racist representations are projections, telling us nothing about African-Americans but, instead, pointing to traits whites fear or reject in themselves in order to

maintain a view of themselves as more “properly” gendered, rational, civilized and superior.

These oppositions bespeak the ways that racism is deeply mired in the same patterns of master consciousness that results in disrespect and abuse of nature. Conventionally, the ass or donkey represents “nature,” which is supposedly opposed to “spirit,” and is “the symbol of the sexual organs, the libido, human instinct and of life confined to the earthly plane of the senses” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996, 52). The double meaning of *ass* as the buttocks reminds us as well that Donkey represents the fundamental human body, with the kind of humor and wisdom that is grounded in the body. In cultures ruled by a mind/body split, the instinctual, sexual, animal, bodily, and sensual are degraded and projected upon those cast in the role of a sexual or ethnic “other.” While renouncing the “coon” stereotype, we can simultaneously re-embrace what the frank and humorous Donkey represents -- the invaluable and often life-saving body brain, what scientists call the “enteric nervous system,” the “gut knowledge” that ideally works in balanced harmony with “brain knowledge” (Brown 2005). It is Donkey who is able to induce the emotionally shut-down Shrek to be able to experience and express feelings of love and friendship; it is Donkey who demands respect and equality from Shrek; and it is Donkey who first sees, and accepts, Fiona in her ogre form. In all of these ways, Donkey speaks for and enacts the Green consciousness that seeks to heal the mind/body split and access holistic, earthy, emotional and frequently riotous carnal wisdom rather than the disembodied cognition so prized by master consciousness.

Respecting the Feminine Principle

What greater praise can I give you than to call you green?
Green, rooted in light, shining like the sun that pours riches on
the wheeling earth; incomprehensible green, divinely
mysterious green, comforting arms of divine green protecting
us in their powerful circle.

Hildegard of Bingen, 12th century, praise song to the
Virgin Mary (cited in Monaghan 1999, 123)

Vandana Shiva (1988, 38-43), the global environmental theorist and activist, writes explicitly of the “feminine principle” in nature as the intelligent, active, originating, fructifying and diverse force, in which both women and men participate. Generally, world mythologies symbolize this principle variously as Goddess, Mother Earth, or Mother Nature. It is beyond my scope here to discuss the differing ways Nature as a feminine principle has been understood (Starbuck 1926; Shiva 1988; Tuana 1993; Newman 2003;

Roach 2005). Suffice it to say that the religions that derive from the Abrahamic tradition (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) feature a purely male divinity. This male God, as he is generally pictured and understood, is firmly associated with the heavens, and is understood as designing nature, making and eventually even destroying the Earth (Daly 1984).

Original generative Goddesses are identified strongly with the Earth and, as in Sumerian myth, commonly take the form of a dragon or serpent. But as patriarchal social structures became established (from the fourth millennium B.C. (Lerner 1986, 7), these Goddesses were said to be monsters, emblems of evil, and were righteously destroyed by Gods and heroes (Caputi 2004). This iconography remains suasive. A statue in front of the United Nations in New York presents the classic heroic trope: a knight slaying a dragon. The sculpture (by Zora Tsereteli) is titled “Good Defeats Evil.” Much mainstream metaphor, religious and otherwise, continues to malign the dragon or serpent as the quintessential emblem of evil. But older, green and gynocentric (female-centered) myth tells us that the serpent/dragon is no symbol of evil, but of the feminine principle, earthy wisdom, and the sinuous and quickening life force itself. With this understanding we can recognize the older and Greener story underlying all those familiar ones about maidens supposedly held captive by nasty dragons. From the perspective of Green consciousness, the dragon is *not* threatening or holding her captive. Rather, the dragon is her double, her emanation, and represents the underlying potency of the feminine principle.⁸ By slaying the dragon, the hero kills off “Goddess,” a principle we also can understand, along with feminist philosophers Mary Daly (1978) and Luce Irigaray (1993), as autonomous female being and becoming.

In the standard patriarchal myths, the hero kills the dragon and is then able to “rescue,” that is capture, the woman and make her his servant/wife. The narrative of *Shrek*, of course, gloriously reverses this hoary trope. This time, the dragon is female, but she is not slain to save the day. Rather, it is Dragon who ultimately intervenes to bring about the happy ending. Through this portrayal, *Shrek* reverses patriarchal myth that identifies evil, sometimes overtly and sometimes more subtly, with the feminine principle and implicitly with nature and with the Earth. And it does so in one other respect as well. The other key female figure is the dual-natured Princess, by daytime human and “beautiful” and by night an “ugly” ogre. This configuration also has exceptional resonance with ancient Earth-based or chthonic myth.

In such myth from numerous cultures, chthonic (earth) deities “nearly always appear in a dual aspect—one friendly and beneficent, the other dark

and sinister, just as the divine pair Demeter and Persephone symbolize, on the one hand, the kindly earth yielding food for man and, on the other, the gloomy depths of Hades” (Geffken 1926, 573-75). This pattern is replicated worldwide. For example, Erzulie (sometimes conflated with Oshun) a Goddess of the African Diaspora, is sometimes loving, beautiful, gentle, and ministering. At other times, she is an older woman and terrible to look at” (Hurstun 1983, 147). In this mode, she can be “insensitive, capricious, and voluble, and she can even become nasty and treacherous; in these darker apparitions, we also see her as an old carrion-eating witch and as the orisha of death” (Benito-Rojo 1988, 14).

It is this complementary dualistic nature of nature –whose twin and necessarily inseparable gifts are both life and death, light and dark, order and chaos - that chthonic deities represent. Patriarchal re-writings of egalitarian myth deliberately changed such complementary dualism into hierarchical opposition, splitting the divine essence, separating Goddess from God, making God wholly male, and then recasting Goddess as dreadful dragon, ugly monster, witch or whore. The Aztec experience, as described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 27-28) is exemplary: “The male-dominated *Azteca-Mexica* culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes . . . thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects. . . . into chaste virgins and . . . *putas*, into Beauties and the Beasts.”⁹ In such binary thinking, one part is not simply different from its counterpart, though with some underlying relation (Collins 1998). Rather, it is seen as inherently opposed to the other, e.g. human feelings cannot be incorporated into thought because feeling supposedly blocks or retards thought. Binary thinking also underlies all types of oppression where one group is defined as the norm and another is defined as the “other. Green Consciousness departs from this model as it is based in a complementary dual pattern, reflecting the necessities of honoring and balancing the high and the low, feminine and masculine, light and dark, increase and decrease, life and death. It recognizes the need to honor the body and not just the spirit, including the functions of the body such as eating, desiring, defecating, growing round, being hairy, getting old – all of which are particularly taboo for women--for human bodies reflect cosmic processes of life, growth and decay and as we eat and grow strong one day, another day our bodies will provide food to other creatures.

This complementary dual pattern is evidenced in the narrative of *Shrek*, a film one of my students suggested should really be called *Fiona*,¹⁰ since the story really belongs to her. Fiona has two sides, an ogre and a

princess, a beast *and* a beauty. The story resolves as Fiona is allowed to integrate into consciousness (the daylight) that powerful part of her inner core that was previously hidden. Still, it always was that inner green ogre that had functioned as her power source, for example, driving her when she handily overcomes Monsieur Hood, a would-be rescuer/captor. Fiona's voice also is remarkably potent, causing a small bird to blow up when she hits a high note as they sing a duet. Adapting to the situation, the Princess takes the eggs for breakfast. While this scene, which is played for laughs, might disturb some viewers, who read it as disrespectful to animals, I would suggest that we consider several factors before rendering judgment. The eggs had no chance of survival without the parent bird; and all living beings need to eat. It is also worthwhile to compare the practical, and powerful Fiona with the conventional Disneyfied princess who sings only sweetly, radiates a purely passive beauty, and possesses no bodily appetites or needs at all. This representation of an impotent feminine principle is the projection of a master consciousness where nature (and women) are mere handmaidens (or, if out of control, troublesome witches) to omnipotent Gods and men. Fiona, like Shrek begins by being ashamed of her ogre side, but, by film's end, finds that she can be happy and proud as she integrates and assumes the form of her physically and psychically large, powerful and very green self.

When the world is ruled by the likes of the fascist Farquaad, the Ogre is either covered up or cast out, said to be the monster, the "other," the very face of fear. The "Keep Out" sign that Shrek paints at the beginning of the film bears his own supposedly ugly and fearsome visage. The archetypally frightful face, of course, belongs to Medusa, the Greek Goddess/monster with hair of snakes, she of the powerful voice and eye, and she whose visage was said to be so horrific that all who beheld her would be turned to stone. In patriarchal myth, Medusa, like other dragon and serpent-identified chthonic Goddesses, is righteously killed by a "hero."

In a celebrated essay, the philosopher Hélène Cixous (1981) looks upon the face of Medusa and affirms that she is not ugly and fearful at all. Rather, she calls upon us to openly gaze at her face, so that we can see that she is "beautiful and laughing" (264). From the perspective of Green consciousness, the chthonic Medusa,¹¹ like Fiona, the Princess/Ogre and like Shrek himself, symbolize what for our health and happiness we need to stop fearing and instead face and embrace—our uniqueness, our diversity, our feelings, our bodily powers and wisdom, our connection to others, and our kinship with all of Earthly life and the Earth itself. *Shrek's* storyline, in fine keeping with the principles of Green consciousness, reminds us to love these aspects of ourselves and others, and to remember that when we do, we can

overcome isolation, alienation and shame, and experience a happiness that is otherwise closed to us. The film ends with an ecstatic dance in the swamp among Shrek, Donkey, Dragon, Fiona, and the whole gaggle of fairy tale beings. Donkey takes center stage singing, "Then I Saw Her Face. Now I'm a Believer,"¹² as the group ritually celebrates happiness, love of self and of others, friendship, harmony and community.

NOTES

1. Many of the works cited throughout this piece are relevant here, as are many of the popular songs of Nina Simone, Joni Mitchell, Sinéad O'Connor and Tori Amos (to mention just a few of the artists I have successfully used in a class I teach on "Green Consciousness." I also ask students to make a "Green scrapbook," analyzing elements of Green consciousness that they find in popular culture, and they regale me with relevant examples from popular music. A sampling of other sources includes Gottlieb 2004; Caputi 1993; Hogan 1995; Hogan 1998; Lopez 1986; Nasr 2004; Shiva 1988; Walker, 1986; Zohar 1990. A sample syllabus for my course on Green Consciousness is available at the Plowshares website, <http://www.plowsharesproject.org/php/resources/participating.syllabi.php>
2. I take some of my phrasing here from an earlier piece (Caputi 2001).
3. Some feminists would not use the word *patriarchy* because they argue that it is a limited concept and does not take into account oppressions other than those of sex. For example, in her excellent feminist response to David Abram, Ann Zavalkoff (2004, 122) takes issue with radical feminists who speak of *patriarchy*, arguing that this overlooks "the connections which exist between sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and all other forms of oppression, whereby these systems are mutually supporting and sustaining." Yet, to the contrary, most feminists who rely upon the concept of *patriarchy* do not overlook these interlocking oppressions at all. Rather, they point to that paradigm at one that is at the heart of patriarchy, defined by historian Gerda Lerner (1997, 146-47) in this way: "Patriarchy is a hierarchical, militaristic social organization in which resources, property, status and privilege are allocated to persons in accordance with culturally defined gender roles. . . . Patriarchy is a system of dominance based on the 'invention' that arbitrary differences among people can be used to construct categories by which the unequal distribution of resources and power by small elites over large and diverse populations can be justified, explained and made acceptable to those exploited." Again, according in Lerner (1986, 8-9), at the beginning of patriarchy as a social formation, during the time of the archaic states, men first defined women as "other" (1986, 15) and appropriated women's sexual and reproductive capacities. This

practice of domination over women led to the institutionalization of slavery, private property, and organized force to maintain these. Sexual oppression is the origin of hierarchy and oppression and the primary model for the series of interlocking oppressions that constitute patriarchy, including those of race and class. For further elaboration see Lerner (1997, 146-198). See also Sjöo and Mor 1991, pp. 229-432.

4. Sjöo and Mor (1991, 17-18) offer a feminist interpretation of Reich, finding great values in his theories on the connections between political oppression and spiritual and sexual oppression. They do note, however, that he continued to enact a form of sexual oppression by advocating only heterosexual sex.
5. Wetlands are regularly destroyed though what we might think of as everyday “unintelligent design”--reckless development, poor planning, and the kind of arrogance that leads some to imagine they can tame rivers, like the Mississippi. Such destruction of wetlands contributed heavily to the disastrous results of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, 2005 (Editorial 2005; Ingham 2005).
6. Both Gordene MacKenzie and Renata Menezes Camara expressed to me their identification of Shrek as a verbal abuser. In the beginning, Shrek has an explosive temper and is downright verbally abusive to Donkey. Still, by film’s end, Donkey has fully confronted Shrek, spoken his truth, and modeled true friendship, based in equality, as well as love. Shrek has grappled with his demons and transformed in a far more believable and complex way than other similar heroes – e.g., the batterers lurking behind princely facades in *Pretty Woman* and Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (Caputi, 2004).
7. I thank Paula Willoquet, an early reader of this paper, who urged me to consider the racism associated with the character of Donkey as did Renata Menezes Camara, who pointed out that Donkey never has a name.
8. Robert Graves (1966, 363 writes): “It is “wrong to suggest that the hero rescues the chained virgin from a male sea-beast. The sea-beast is female – the Goddess Tiamat or Rahab. . . . it has even been suggested that in the original icon, the Goddess’s chains were really necklaces, bracelets and anklets, while the sea-beast was her emanation.”
9. I first developed these ideas and used some of this language and references in Caputi (2004, 13-14).

10. Thanks to Alex Chery for this insight.
11. Medusa's chthonic nature is evident not only in her association with snakes, but also because it was believed that the blood drawn from one side of her body would heal, and blood drawn from the other side would kill.
12. "I'm a Believer," was written by Neil Diamond and the song first became a hit when sung by the Monkees in 1966. Arguably, the film's final scene and song is urging viewers to once again give their "belief" to the (Green) Goddess. The reference to "her face" recalls not only the previously suppressed ogre face of Fiona, but also the long repressed but now returning face of Nature/Goddess.

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