

Concealed Forms - Female Connotations on Earth and Moon

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to present the symbolic signification that Earth, Moon and female forms have in ancient mythology and the diversity of artistic representations. For Gaston Bachelard, the perfect method in analyzing the phenomenology of images is to designate the image as an excess of the imagination. The main task of the imagination is to enlarge it beyond reality. "To truly overcome, you must increase, because the imagination works freely on space, forces, time or shapes. Imagination works not only with plane images, but also in the ideas having the capacity to push to excesses. There are ideas that dream. Certain scientific theories are vast reveries, boundless reveries" says Gaston Bachelard in his book, *The Poetics of Space*². But all these associations or reveries that seem to be initially mere personal observations on the similarities between the different things that surround us, became actually the basis of the most important scientific discoveries. As well as in art, they were at the origin of some of the most important myths of civilization, poems, sculptures and paintings. Without the aforementioned observations, the art would not have had the depth and complexity it achieves through these exercises of imagination both on earth and in heaven. Regardless of the different epochs that humanity has gone through in its history, the observations of the interconnections in the visible and the invisible world or between the different realms and phenomena of nature, for example, have given people moments of fear, of knowledge (of science) or reverie (poets and artists). So the discussion of the feminine form is inconceivable without mentioning an entire connected world that people, regardless of age, taste or culture, that are related to it.*

Key-words: *Feminin symbolism; Mother Earth; mythology; Moon symbolism.*

1. Introduction

The theory of the five primordial elements (water, fire, wood, metal and earth), dating to approximately the second millennium BC, attests that the Taoists noticed the most subtle changes in nature, orienting their life and activities accordingly. The Chinese philosophy considers that all phenomena in the Universe correspond in nature to one or the other of the five elements and they are in a continuous movement and transformation. On one hand, they are in relation of concordance in time and space (water with winter and North, fire with summer and South, wood with East, metal with autumn and West, the land being in the center, providing support to all other elements), and on the other hand, each element also corresponds to an animal, an organ, a color or a plant. Of course, it was inconceivable to move all of these elements without referring to the active influence of the Yin and Yang principles. The five elements act on each other, being born one by one, one by another or destroying one another.³

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² Gaston Bachelard. 2005. *Poetica spațiului*. București: Editura Paralela 45, p. 142.

³ Alexander Eliot, Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade. 1976. *L'univers des fantastique Myths*. USA: Published by Plume, p. 70.

The opposition between the two Yin and Yang principles represents, in free translation, the shady and luminous side of a valley, and by extension the dark and sunny aspect of this world, positive and negative, heaven and earth, the feminine and the masculine aspect, the expression of universal dualism and complementarism.

Graphically, the Yin element is represented by a dashed line, while the Yang element is a continuous line. The equality of the two surfaces, while on each white surface there is a black point and on each black surface a white point, is the expression of the fact that the signs represent an interdependence of the feminine-masculine principles. These symbols decompose time into periods and space into regions, periods and spaces being qualified when Yin, when Yang, thus having a proven influence on time and space, according to certain characteristics and antonymic groups (light / dark, good / bad, inside / outside, hot / cold, masculine / feminine, open / closed).

The masculine principle, like the feminine principle, should not be understood exclusively on a biological level including the sex of the individual, but must be viewed at a much higher and wider level. Thus, a whole range of relationships and comparisons are created which give the feminine aspect the value of a universal symbol which, together with the masculine one, completing itself, forms a unitary whole.

In Judaism, God-man has his female correspondent in God-woman or Shekinah. As in the Eastern religions the personification of the god bears a feminine side, usually his merciful, compassionate side, to the same extent, and Shekina is the God in human form.

Shekinah is also the symbol of earthly femininity. Thus, “all women in the world are under the protection of Shekinah “ or “for the mystics, it is the first stage of access to the divine.” The feminine is associated with proximity, the earthly world is the reflection of the heavenly world and everything that happens here, downstream, has direct consequences on the divine sphere. Thus, the union between a man and a woman is “a symbolic realization of the union of God and the Shekinah.” Pauline Bebe observes an interesting thing, namely, the character of the Shekinah is similar to that of the woman: “Shekinah is a mother, caring for her children. Believers try to see it because they value it, but it hides from their eyes, no doubt out of modesty or discretion, traits that tradition generally attributes to women.”⁴

2. The Earth

According to authors Cheris Kramerae and Dale Spender, since prehistory, the Earth has been seen in many popular cultures as the mother and matrix of life. For Europeans, the most well-known reference is in Greek mythology, which begins with Gaia or Earth, the feminine form born directly from primordial chaos. In the Homeric hymn, she is called Panmhteiran or HyUemeUlon, which in translation would mean mother of all living beings and the oldest being.⁵

This Greek concept of Mother Earth descends from older beliefs, belonging to the primitive man who understood the total dependence of life on earth. Dating back to 250,000 years ago, the images found in the caves of Northern Europe highlight the way in which primitive people viewed the interdependence of human and nature. Plants and animals were represented alongside female figures, often called Venus, whose reproductive function is clearly suggested by their forms. Later, in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, clay figures representing women are engraved with motifs that suggest symbols of water and plants, precisely to emphasize the reproductive capacity of the woman, similar to that of the earth.

⁴ Pauline Bebe. 2002. *Women and Judaism*. Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, p. 301.

⁵ Cheris Kramerae, Dale Spender. 2000. *Routledge international encyclopedia of women: global women's*, vol I: Ed. Routledge, p. 305.

Following this idea that runs from prehistoric beliefs to modern art, we see a resumption of these themes in the works of artists who take from the visual experience of the primitives and are freed from the stylistic constraints of the era. Thus, in a period dominated by the game and the glitter of the water that had become a favorite motif of the impressionists, the painter Ion Andreescu is strongly fascinated by the earth, a fascination that we could identify as a primitive one. Here is what Andrei Pleșu writes in this regard in "Picturesque and melancholy": "The earth, the heavy organic mass, is categorically the absolute vocation of Andreescu, the key to his talent. You can reproduce the land, as the Barbizon painters do, and not only them, as a mere fertility cradle, as a pedestal on which the baroque vegetation rises. Others, less sensitive to the succulence of the "earth-mum", taste the picturesque accidents that occur in its structure: the boulder, the grating, the irregular in all forms."⁶

The earth symbolizes the maternal function, the Mother, the source of being and life. She gives her life, but she takes it back. The earth is a symbol of fertility and regeneration. She gives birth to all beings, feeds them, then receives the fertilizing germ again. There are some African tribes in which the pregnant woman swallows the land considered a symbol of identification. Appearing to be the origin of all life, the earth was given the name of Great Mother. In relation to the Waters that are also at the origin of things, the Earth is distinguished by the fact that the Waters precede the organization of the cosmos, while the Earth produces the living forms. "The woman ... is the earth itself worn on the peaks of life, the earth becoming sensitive and happy; and without it, for men, the earth is dumb and dead."⁷

In Asia, as in Africa, according to certain beliefs, barren women can barren the land of the family and the husband may repudiate them for this reason. On the other hand, pregnant women can enrich crops by throwing wheat in the furrow; they are a source of fertility. For the Aztecs, the goddess Earth has two opposite aspects: it is the Nutrition Mum that allows us to live from its vegetation, but also destructive because it demands in exchange the death with which it feeds. For the Maya Indians, the earth is the moon goddess, queen of the cycles of fertility. The old Mayan goddess, selenarian and earthly, has a primordial function: she is the master of number one. This means that she watches over the birth and origins of everything.

An Indian prophet advises his disciples "not to dig the earth, for it is a sin to hurt and cut it, to tear our mother of all for agricultural work." Will I take the knife to fill it in my mother's womb? Will I mutilate his flesh to the bone? How could I dare to cut my mother's hair? ". In central India, Baija Indians also believe that "it is a shame to tear the mother's breast with the plow iron." And conversely, Aeschylus says of Oedipus, "he dared to sow the sacred fence in which he was conceived." Sophocles spoke of "parental furrows" and "plumber, owner of a distant field, whom he visits only once, at the time of sowing." In an Egyptian song, the lover declared: "I am the earth!", And in Islamic texts, the woman is called "field ... alive with grapes". In one of his hymns, St. Francis of Assisi tells us about "our sister, our mother, who cares for us and which produces the most varied fruits, with multicolored flowers and grass."⁸

With its roots rooted in the earth and the branches raised to the sky, the tree is considered to be a symbol of the relationships established between heaven and earth. In all faiths, both the symbolism and the image of the tree are sexually ambivalent. Thus, the trunk raised to the sky, symbol of solar eminences of force and power, is nothing but the phallus, archetypal image of the father. In turn, the scrubby tree, as well as the thick, enveloping foliage where the birds nest and periodically roost, evokes the archetypal image of the fertile mother.

⁶ Andrei Pleșu. 2003. *Picturesque and melancholy*. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, p.104.

⁷ Michael Carrouges. 2010. *Women's Powers*, South Cahiers, no. 292.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir. 2006. *Second Sex*, vol. I. Bucharest: Editura Univers, p. 206.

In the book of Elena Niculiță-Voronca, entitled “The customs and beliefs of the Romanian people”, the author collects words of the Romanian peasant, obviously containing a certain naivety, regarding the intimate connection between the woman, the fruit of the womb and the fruit of the earth. For example: “The earth is a woman, and in it God has put all the seeds to nourish us”; “The earth is a woman, it is our mother who feeds us and makes us, and God from her is her husband, she is our father, we are their children”; “For those Women that are clean, God gives fruit and bread to them. After a clean woman or girl, everything grows and the dry grass, where it treads, turns green “or” If the woman or the unclean girl lays flowers on her head, the field wil be broken.”⁹

3. The Moon

The woman is part of the redoubtable gear that controls the course of the stars and the sun, the prey of cosmic forces that regulate the destiny of the stars, whose uneasy irradiation is felt by men. The moon is a source of fertility, but it also appears as the symbol of women. It is often believed that, in the form of a snake or a man, the Moon mates with the woman. The snake is an epiphany of the moon, it scratches its coat and regenerates itself, it is immortal, it is also a force that spreads fertility and science. Persian and Rabbinic media claim that menstruation was caused by the first woman's relationship with the snake.¹⁰

Perhaps the earliest form of manifestation of the relationship between woman and moon is represented by the connection, as we might call it organic, between the two. Alexander Marshak demonstrated that in the Upper Palaeolithic there was a symbolic time-scoring system based on observing the lunar phases. This scoring system has been maintained for over 25,000 years and shows that this monthly cycle was analyzed, memorized and used for practical purposes even from the dawn of our civilization. Thus, we understand better the considerable role of the moon in archaic mythologies and, above all, the fact that “the monthly symbolism has integrated in one and the same system such varied realities as woman, water, vegetation, snake, fertility, death, rebirth”.¹¹

One of the most fascinating assumptions related to Cucutenians was presented by Dr. Romeo Dumitrescu and refers to the 21 female statues discovered in a ceramic box in Isaiah (Iasi). Of the 50,000 statues discovered since the research of Cucuteni Culture, one in 40 is male. This civilization, which lived for about 1,200 years, reached a demographic figure that did not exceed 1.2 million inhabitants. Cucutenians were very wealthy in terms of food resources and were very careful about fertility. All the statues are made as if a woman had seen and studied her body, with details on the reproductive part. It seems that the statues were made by women, paying close attention to all these details. Thus, the 21 statuettes present a logical fertility pattern, over 4,000 years old on a 21-day hormonal pattern. This true fertility guide points to the time when the Cucutean woman had to have sex in order to have children and explains the great need to have descendants of that civilization. “¹²

⁹ Elena Niculiță-Voronca. 1998. *The customs and beliefs of the Romanian people gathered and settled in mythological order*. Iasi: Ed. Polirom, p.152.

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir. 2006. *Second Sex*, vol. I. Bucharest: Editura Univers, p. 213.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade. 1981. *History of religious beliefs and ideas*. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, p. 44.

¹² Dan Mircea Cipariu. March 9, 2006. “The state does not give appreciation the Cucuteni Culture”. In *Ziua*, no. 3569, pp. 15 - 16.



Fig 1. Woman with horn, Aurignacian

Source of image: <http://pictify.saatchigallery.com/470151/woman-with-horn-from-laussel-france-photograph-by-alain-rousot>

The image of the stylized moon appears in a well-known relief from Laussel, where a female figure in the style of Venus from Lespuge and Wilendorf holds in her hand the half moon with rays, and the other hand near the belly. Its name is given generically, “The woman with the horn” and the image was familiar to me, like its title, but only after studying the phenomenon I realized that it is very possible that the object in the character's hand may not be a horn, but the iconic sign of the month.

Before science explained that menstruation in women is caused by hormones, there was the generally accepted idea that menstruation is a cause of the lunar cycle (here's a possible source of the name of this phenomenon) and, of course, the reason why the female figure has in one hand the sign of the month, and the other next to the womb. And if the moon controls the water of the ocean (the phenomenon of flux - reflux), why wouldn't it happen with the woman too ?! After all, our body has more than 70% water. So, from time immemorial, the idea that the woman has two fertile periods has taken root: the first, in the period between menstruation and the second determined by the phases of the month.



Fig 2. Woman in Cucuteni

Source of image: <https://www.archaeology.org/issues/109-1311/features/1349-cucuteni-figurine-romania-neolithic-culture>

The theory that there was a close connection between women's fertility and the phases of the moon is attributed to Dr. Eugen Jonas, who in the 50s of the last century sought an explanation for why women remained pregnant despite careful scheduling. Being a passionate astrologer, he also focused on how to calculate the fertility period in the past based on the phases of the month. Later tests showed that he was right, 98% of those calculating in both ways, taking into account the calendar and the phases of the month, being effective in preventing an unwanted pregnancy, compared to 75% of the women who relied only on calendar calculation.

Even if the connection between the human body and the moon is not yet fully understood, the existence of an interdependence between the full moon and our emotional state is proven. Doctors working in emergency hospitals always tell that the most hectic night of the whole month is the one in which the full moon appears.

There is also the theory that the first calendars were based on the monthly cycle, but also on the menstrual cycle of the woman: a pagan calendar with thirteen months, each with twenty-eight days and totaling in one year three hundred sixty-four days; compared to the solar one (which is kept and applied today), counting twelve months and with different number of days from one month to another. Another scientific observation starts from the premise that the woman is fertile during the month when the month is in the same phase as

when that person was born. In other words, if a woman is born full moon, she will become fertile every full month throughout her life.

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein is of the opinion that the Babylonian idea of the Sabbath, a distant source of the Sabbath, is perhaps related to the evil day of the moon-goddess Istar, who was believed to have neither increased nor decreased when menstruating; and on that day it is dangerous to travel, work or even eat boiled food, common bans with the Sabbath. “It is strange for us to believe that the prohibitions on the celebration of the Sabbath are, at their distant origins, taboos related to the belief that the moon itself is a woman who has menstruation and is ill from it.”¹³

In the book “Women and Judaism”, Pauline Bebe talks about the celebration of Rosh hodesh , the new moon, which has traditionally been attributed to women. “The destiny of the month in creation was compared to that of the woman, no doubt because the menstrual cycle of the woman resembles the cycle of the evolution of the month. In primitive mythologies, the moon was conceived as a goddess, linked to the idea of the mother-earth and influencing fertility “.

Arlene Agus, in the article “This month is for you: observing Rosh hodesh as a woman's holiday,” on page 92, draws attention to the fact that his acronym red hodacism is a rhyme (“uterus”), associated with the attribute of God's mercy, having In this way, he considered that day as “a break to thank God that he made us women.”

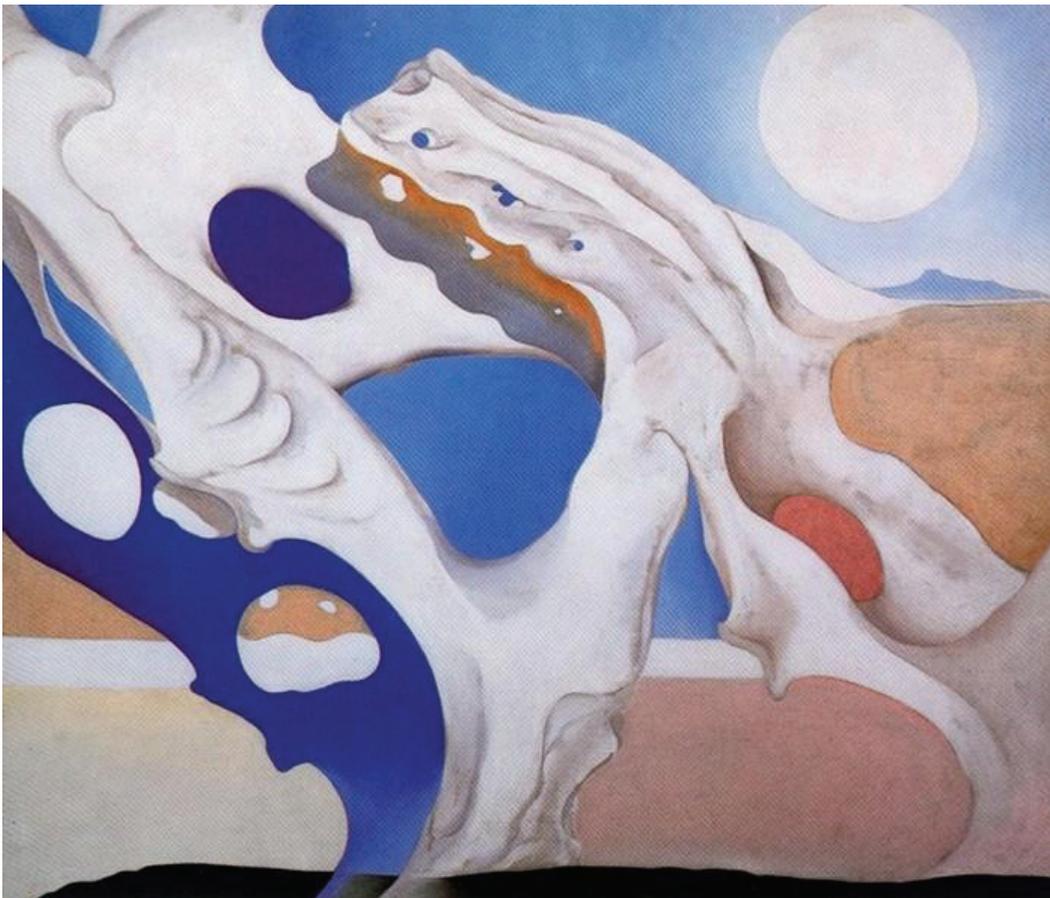


Fig 3. *Shadow with Pelvis and Moon* by Georgia O'Keeffe
Source of image: <https://curiator.com/art/georgia-okeeffe/200>

¹³ Esther Harding, 2001. *Woman's Mysteries*. Boston, USA: Shambhala Publications Inc., p. 63.

Even in modern art, there is an intimate connection that is established between the reproductive function of the woman and the moon. Georgia O'Keeffe paints flowers with accentuated feminine sexual characteristics, but also bones, the permanent testimony of the perishable being. For example, in the work "Pelvis with the Moon", to emphasize the feminine character of the moon, the author joins the celestial astral bone.

4. Conclusion

We can see now that basic observations were at the origin of some of the most important myths of civilization, poems, sculptures and paintings. Without this observations, the art would not have had the depth and complexity it achieves through these exercises of imagination both on earth and in heaven.

Dating back to 250,000 years ago, the images found in the caves of Northern Europe highlight the way in which primitive people viewed the interdependence of human and nature. Plants and animals were represented alongside female figures, often called Venus, whose reproductive function is clearly suggested by their forms. In most of the popular cultures the earth symbolizes the maternal function, the Mother, the source of being and life, while Alexander Marshak demonstrated that in the Upper Palaeolithic there was also a symbolic time-scoring system based on observing the lunar phases. Between the moon, the earth and the female body is established a connection we can call organic and that artists of different eras continue to speculate in their works of art.

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