Introduction

*A Kick in the Imagination*

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It requires a kick in the imagination, a wrenching of tired words, to realize that feminism is the final and therefore the first cause, and that *this* movement *is* movement. Realization of this is already the beginning of a qualitative leap in be-ing... but the final cause that is *movement* *is* in our imaginative-cerebral-emotional-active-creative be-ing.

—Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 190

Mary Daly’s writings—and her living presence when she was on the planet—proved to be a continuous “kick in the imagination” for her associates and perceptive readers. Sensing that the women’s revolution required a philosophic arc to persist, she worked tirelessly to provide one. From the core of language to political creativity, from analyzing the horrors of patriarchy to celebrating women’s communities, Daly synthesized the women’s movement in thought, even as she lived it. That is a legacy worth celebrating and cerebrating, questioning and questing.

*The Mary Daly Reader* was first conceived by Mary Daly herself, with goading from Jennifer Rycenga, in the early years of the twenty-first century. The need for an anthology of her work emerged as it seemed that the impact and richness of her thought were disappearing as time receded. A further impetus was provided by the many professors who would ask how best to include Daly’s work in their classes.

Conversations began in 2003, just as Daly was finishing *Amazon Grace*. As a systematic philosopher, Daly had initial misgivings about an excerpted reader, but overcame that resistance as the positive aspects of such a book became clear. Daly chose many excerpts herself, highlight-
ing her most significant breakthroughs and ideas. She was particularly eager to include the “Final Cause” section from *Beyond God the Father*, the Harvard Memorial Exodus, and her writings on female friendship from *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*. Other preliminary choices made by Rycenga—such as the opening chapters of *Beyond God the Father* and *Gyn/Ecology*—were enthusiastically endorsed by Daly. A few choices were made after her passing, particularly from *Outercourse*.

After Daly’s death in 2010, Linda Barufaldi, who had been Daly’s graduate student, friend, and reader during the writing of *Beyond God the Father* and *Gyn/Ecology*, joined the project. Over the next four years we met regularly to cull the best and most representative excerpts from Daly’s eight books, writing introductions to each excerpt to contextualize them in the histories of philosophy, feminist thought, and women’s activism.

Daly’s work has inspired both of the editors to lifelong feminist thought and activism. We contend that Daly’s work is foundational to feminist philosophy, but fear that academics and students are losing touch with it, or know it only in caricature. *The Mary Daly Reader* is meant to revive Daly’s legacy as the groundbreaking thinker and scholar that she was.

This book runs in chronological order across Daly’s work, starting with *The Church and the Second Sex*. The earliest excerpts find Daly still a member of, even an apologist for, the catholic church. From 1971 forward, Daly broke decisively with christianity and all patriarchal religions. This is reflected in later excerpts, starting with the Harvard Memorial Church walkout and her philosophic breakthrough in *Beyond God the Father*. From 1974 to 1984 Daly chronicled the atrocities patriarchy committed against women, and constructed a biophilic world surpassing those limitations, in *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*. These two books also marked the full emergence of Daly’s characteristically scintillating neologisms and wordplay as part of her creation/discovery of realms beyond patriarchy. Unfortunately, strong articulation of her ideas led to equally strong reactions and disagreements, most crucially within the feminist community. Third world women, women of color, and transgender people all had well-publicized disagreements with Daly, some of them resulting in permanent severing of connections and conversations. One of the goals of this reader is to revisit those conversa-
tions and arguments, forty years after the fact, to re-examine these fault lines.

Daly’s idiosyncratic yet highly resonant development of language culminated in the publication of the *Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (in cahoots with Jane Caputi) in 1987. This book includes an essay on words and language, but largely consists of definitions and etymologies of the words Daly developed for her philosophy. Therefore, we have woven Daly’s playful and meaningful neologisms from the *Wickedary* as epigraphs to our editorial introductions.

Daly’s final three books—*Outercourse, Quintessence, and Amazon Grace*—presumed the readers’ familiarity with Daly’s philosophic language. The autobiographical *Outercourse* yields many contextual clues about Daly’s life. She was a product of her generation and of her upbringing in a segregated immigrant Catholic neighborhood. While that does not excuse her from any failings in her work, it helps us to comprehend the source of her limitations. We needn’t deprive ourselves of her many brilliant insights to punish her for her lacunae, though. Her final two books, concerned with environmental collapse, are more topically focused, while also increasingly invested in a post-patriarchal world. The excerpts from these later books illustrate continuity in Daly’s thought, and bring to light some hidden gems of insight.

In the years since Daly’s passing the continued significance of her work, for reasons both substantial and controversial, has remained patent. The notion that “patriarchy is the prevailing religion of the entire planet”\(^1\) is still all too real, whether one looks at terrorist violence, reduced access to reproductive health care, or attempts to restrict women’s education. This anthology provides new readers with a guide to Daly’s work and an invitation to explore it further. The bibliography of Daly’s own writings opens one set of pathways; the extensive secondary sources listed here reveal the intellectual ferment that her works have created. The editors have also provided a thorough index that references philosophic terms, proper names, and Daly’s own neologisms. Together these resources are intended to make this book a useful starting point for scholarship.

Daly’s originality arises from her combination of feminist ethics, transcendent spiritual experience, philosophic dynamism, and linguistic enchantment, all simmering in an imagination shaped by catholic
theology but decisively liberated from its institutional and scriptural limitations. Her love of perpetual transformation could be seen in her life, where she “communicate[d] a kind of contagious freedom.”\textsuperscript{2} This took on distinctly ontological dimensions in her thought. When she rejected divine revelation, she made it clear that “realizing reason is both dis-covering and participating in the unfolding, the Self-creation, of reason.”\textsuperscript{3} She championed an open cosmology, eschewing stability in favor of ever-expanding creativity:

The women’s revolution, insofar as it is true to its own essential dynamics, is an ontological, spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence. . . . [T]he vision of human becoming as a process of integration and transformation . . . potentially includes both the individualistic ontological dimension of depth and revolutionary participation in history.\textsuperscript{4}

Daly was never a disinterested thinker. She maintained a “righteous fear of compromise,”\textsuperscript{5} castigating academic objectivity as intrinsic to necrophilic thought. Instead, she adopted the mantle of constant fury/Fury at the erasure of countless generations of women, a resolute refusal to forget the context of women’s lives. Daly even claimed that “Freed Fury makes hate, aversion, and sorrow biophilic. No longer twisted inward, devouring women’s Selves, these passions purge our souls of horizontal violence.”\textsuperscript{6}

Daly’s facility with wordplay makes an impression on most readers, but the depth of her commitment to the integrity and deep roots of language is not grasped as easily as her linguistic agility. She often declared that women have had the power of naming stolen from us, whether that meant naming our own experiences or naming the perpetrators of violence against us. Words and their etymologies became for Daly a lively link to pre-patriarchal times. Words “radiate knowledge of an ancient age, and . . . let us know that they, the words themselves, are treasures trying to be freed.”\textsuperscript{7} Her use of word-lore created a vocabulary that was off-putting to some readers but served others as a gateway to thinking beyond the given, creating neologisms to match not only the experience of feminism, but its yet-to-be-realized aspirations. She saw each of her books fulfilling a similar dialectic role, as “crystal balls, Glowing Globes”
that “help us to foretell the future and to dis-cover the past” by making what was inarticulate into something that “we explicitly know, and therefore can reflect upon, criticize.”

In this compilation we have attempted to contextualize Daly’s controversial positions on race and transgender identity to make them comprehensible, especially to those who find them unacceptable or repugnant. Daly was a participant in bruising debates over hierarchies of oppression. These debates, many of which still rage today, may affect readers’ perception of Daly’s feminist ethics. But the moral clarity that appears obvious today was often opaque to sincerely ethical feminists in the late 1970s. Contrary to the easy assumption that Daly was an “essentialist feminist,” it is important to see that she had been influenced by Buber, wanting to see every person in their subjectivity, because no matter how damaged that subjectivity was, it was never destroyed. Her anger, though, at those who attempted to destroy others’ subjectivities and lives was in constant tension with a more embracing ideal.

Daly’s influences form a heterogeneous mix of women and men, medieval and contemporary, feminists and leftists. Her appreciation for foresisters like Simone de Beauvoir, Elizabeth Gould Davis, Virginia Woolf, Sojourner Truth, and preeminently Matilda Joslyn Gage will be evident. Her contemporaries and allies included Nelle Morton, Emily Culpepper, Sally Roesch Wagner, Louky Bersianik, and Robin Morgan. Theological students will be interested by her references to Jacques Maritain, Johannes Metz, Martin Buber, Harvey Cox, Paul Tillich, and her ultimate touchstone, Thomas Aquinas. One charming instance of this connection is how medieval angelology fascinated her, offering a legacy of philosophic speculation on a qualitatively different way of being, free from the limitations that plagued the patriarchal foreground.

The second wave of feminism emerged in midcentury after a few decades of quiescence following the success of the suffrage movement in the 1920s. While women’s freedom expanded with factory work in World War II, the aftermath of the war eagerly reinscribed strict gender-role stereotypes. Reflections on living through that time, by such major thinkers as Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich, speak to the sense of entrapment that women felt. Mary Daly’s situation, as a young white working-class woman aligned with the explicitly patriarchal Catholic church, meant that she was subject to the full brunt of this conform-
ism. Her intellect, though, provided her a sanctuary in the realms of philosophy, theology, and academia.

The second wave of feminism came fully to life from within leftist activism in the 1960s, including the anti-war, free speech, farmworker, and civil rights movements. Women were participants in these movements but found themselves frequently relegated to second-class status, making coffee, typing leaflets, running mimeograph machines, and cleaning the hall after a meeting, but overlooked as authors, speakers, or leaders. The same logic that led to calls for equal rights across lines of race and class was extrapolated to gender by thinking women. However, because of the legacy of the Left, issues of religion were often ignored or treated as examples of “false consciousness” by early feminist activists.

From 1960 to 1966, Mary Daly was studying philosophy and theology in Europe. Upon her return to accept a teaching position at Boston College, the women’s liberation movement was already in its nascent stages. Her topic for her first major publication—*The Church and the Second Sex*—demonstrates her connection to the new movement. She also engaged with the major existing philosophic source of feminist thought, wrestling with Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, at that time little known to American women.

To understand Daly’s relation to second wave feminism, the reader must keep in mind the particularities of her situation: her emphasis on intellectual work, her concern for the religious imagination (both destructive and constructive uses), and a deep commitment to the women’s liberation movement, but always with a sense that she had arrived to that movement with an agenda distinct from its founders’. Her catholic heritage means that Daly might be one of the few major thinkers who came to feminism from a conservative bastion rather than from within the Left (though Daly would certainly be characterized as a progressive catholic in the Vatican II mold of the 1960s).

It is over forty years since the publication of *Beyond God the Father*. The impact of this work in feminist thought, theology, and philosophy still reverberates, due to Daly’s adroit combination of ethical outrage, ontological insight, and reimagining of the divine from static being to dynamic verb. The bulk of her life’s writings developed from that insight, growing alongside the feminist movement of the late twentieth century. She was an active participant in such controversies as the environmen-
tal crisis, the anti-nuclear movement, the persistence of racism in the United States, the emergence of transgender politics, and the lesbian and gay rights movement. Her positions on some of these issues may come across as dated, even offensive, to contemporary readers, but they emerged from specific circumstances, both historical and personal.

Roseanne Barr, the famed comedian, has said that reading *Gyn/Ecology* with her sister and other feminists helped her to find her voice as a comic and gave her the strength to pursue that goal. Regardless of history’s eventual judgment of Mary Daly, the importance her thought had on women at that moment is integral to a clear understanding of that period. Those were heady times, and Daly’s writing sparked many feminists’ heads. Some of what made the movement so powerful for women was how the emotions generated by freedom and liberation were grounded in serious intellectual rigor that took women’s history and situation into account. Daly was key in fleshing out the philosophical and ethical bases upon which the movement moved. Recall that when Daly was writing *Beyond God the Father*, women could rarely support themselves, obtain credit in their own names, or even imagine themselves above the glass ceiling.

Not only did Mary Daly insist that women think outside the box, she made it imperative to ask who set up the box in the first place, and why. A systematic thinker, Daly practiced a hermeneutics of suspicion that drove her ethical outrage at the treatment of women, yet always took care to balance that outrage with a vision of hope. The letters that Daly received from readers after the publication of *Beyond God the Father* indicate that she had indeed kicked the imagination into action for many. Women wrote that they were going to pursue their ambitions because of the boost in confidence that the book gave them, including one woman who wrote that, at age eighty, to find someone saying aloud what she had been thinking to herself all of her life meant she could now die happy!

Mary Daly’s personality paralleled her work: enthusiastic, supremely self-confident, generous yet quickly defensive, brilliant, often personable, even charming, yet equally quick with derisive responses. She was revered, loved, and challenged by her students. Daly was capable of incredible kindness, taking her students to dinner and creating academic opportunities for them. In fact, she treated her students as equals in the struggle, a new stance for a professor, even stating, in the introduction
to *Beyond God the Father*, that her graduate students’ “friendship, ideas, and process of becoming are woven into the fabric of this book.”

She was also capable of withering contempt. Strongly intuitive, but also used to the solitary work of a philosopher, she could be impatient. As Mary Hunt has observed, none of those who loved her ever accused her of being easy to get along with. We can’t say she didn’t exacerbate some of the famous disputes she was engaged in. However, Daly was not the only strong and self-confident personality in the women’s liberation movement; none of the fierce debates of the time can be separated from the personalities that drove them.

The transformative power of Daly’s thought has had a lasting impact on many readers. Even those who later came to disagree with her recognize how their initial encounter with her work revealed, as Barufaldi recalls, how “everything before was a great lie.” She had turned her own world around, from being deeply ensconced within the Catholic church to bursting through the inadequacies of that system. Having liberated herself, she threw the doors open to legions of readers.

Daly’s work, in its daring scope, needs to be seen in the context of the disparities in life opportunities that existed between women and men in America at that time. Daly outlines some of these restrictions on her own education and prospects in the excerpts included here from *Outercourse*. Her response, though, to these limitations consistently involved a radical break from the given. As she wrote in *Beyond God the Father*, “Women are not merely ‘re-thinking’ philosophy and theology but are participating in new creation. The process implies beautiful, self-actualizing anger, love, and hope.”

As a living person, Mary Daly had a delightful and flirtatious smile to complement her great cackling laugh. She reveled in being a crone, swimming in the lake behind her dwelling into her mid-seventies, conversing with the ducks and geese that flew overhead. She lived with numerous feline familiars (who make cameo appearances in her writings). Her connection to animals and her love of nature were charmingly small in scale, intimate yet cosmic.

Women’s lives, women’s minds, women’s spiritual freedom—these were the touchstones in Daly’s work. She glimpsed—and tried to live—a vision of women as biophilic creatures, opposing the death-dealers of the twentieth century in essence and in deed. Philosophic debates over
whether or not Daly was an “essentialist” can fruitfully draw from this volume, but her hope that women’s liberation would show the way out of the destructive history of the world was what guided her ethical thought. She always sounded a note of courage to balance her anger and outrage:

This writing has been done in hope. Hopefully it represents not merely a continuation but a new beginning. Certainly it is not The Last Word. But insofar as it brings forth the right word it will be heard, for the right word will have the power of reality in it.¹³