Helen Bramley (2002) 'Diana, Princess of Wales: The Contemporary Goddess'
Sociological Research Online, vol. 7, no. 1,
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/1/bramley.html>>

To cite articles published in *Sociological Research Online*, please reference the above information and include paragraph numbers if necessary

Received: 8/5/2002

Accepted: 28/5/2002

Published: 31/5/2002

From myth to the paranormal

1.1

During the course of this piece of work, the writer will firstly offer a definition of 'a goddess' and will then go on to give an outline of how within a certain period in history and in a variety of forms, the image of the feminine principle appeared. The writer will then discuss how female deities seemed to be worshipped by a number of differing cultures that were spread across vast territory and time, until the goddess in all her manifestations disappeared almost as spontaneously as she appeared. Consequently, the second aim of this piece of work is to parallel the image of the late Diana Princess of Wales with that of the goddess, as through public adoration she perhaps became the most powerful image in world popular culture today, possibly demonstrating that the ancient archetypes of the goddess religion are not obsolete but stronger and deeper than ever ([Paglia 1994](#)). The writer will outline theories from a number of disciplines to aid the discussion, including those of sociology, feminism and the psychology of religion in order to examine the possibility that Princess Diana became a product of contemporary myth construction to become a goddess of our time.

1.2

A Goddess, as defined by the [Oxford English Dictionary \(1996\)](#) is a female deity worshipped like a god, or a woman who is an adored, admired or influential person. The image of the Goddess appeared long ago, some twenty thousand years ago or possibly even more, stretching across territory ranging from the Pyrenees to Siberia in the form of female statuettes, figurines and motifs, ([Tringham & Conkey 1998](#); Gimbutas 1989). Made

from stone, bone and ivory, more than one hundred and thirty statues were discovered resting in rock or soil alongside the tools and bones of the Palaeolithic people, or alternatively sculptured in rock above the caves where these people lived, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#)). Little is known of the insight or dreams, which inspired the creation of these female sacred images, nor perhaps shall the rituals performed surrounding such deities ever be truly known, thus the world is left with a gigantic jigsaw puzzle of which it appears two-thirds is missing, ([Gimbutas 1989](#); [Leick 1991](#)). It would seem however, that a multitude of stories and images of the goddess have, like many other later religions such as Islam and Christianity, crossed the boundaries of time and space, covered various periods of history and incorporated many cultures along the way, ([Gimbutas 1989](#)). These appear to range from the previously mentioned Palaeolithic period through to the later Neolithic period, covering territory belonging to the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece, right through the ages to contemporary artistic interpretations of the Virgin Mary, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#)). Thus such images and stories have served to highlight similarities in the myths of the Goddess, which seem to span a number of apparently unrelated cultures, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#)). The goddess in all her manifestations as the creatress, virgin, mother, destroyer, warrior, huntress, homemaker, wife, artist, jurist, healer and sorcerer has throughout the centuries seemingly acquired a thousand names and a thousand faces, but most always she has represented nature, ([Hefner 2001](#)). [Baring & Cashford \(1993\)](#) outline that the 'Mother Goddess' wherever she is found, is an image that inspires and focuses a perception of the universe as an alive and sacred whole, thus weaving together in one cosmic web the whole of humanity and all life on Earth, who as a result become 'her children'.

1.3

Within a particular period in history (believed to be between the Bronze Age and Iron Age), the focus for worshipping was transferred from the goddess to a father god, whom within the three patriarchal religions known today as: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is viewed as sole primal creator, without consort, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#)). This transformation, however, was not a replacement of one culture by another, but instead a general hybridization of two differing symbolic systems, ([Gimbutas 1989](#)). [Gimbutas \(1989\)](#) outlines that the ancient Goddess belief system, along with its images and symbols were never totally suppressed, but are rather more likely to have gone 'underground', remaining as an undercurrent, as they could perhaps have been eradicated only with the total extermination of the female population.

1.4

[Gimbutas \(1989\)](#) suggests that the image of the goddess has perhaps stood the test of time by being passed through the ages courtesy of mythological songs, customs, rituals and folktales such as fairytales. Harold [Bayley \(1912\)](#), a scholar of folklore tales in the early years of the Twentieth Century, offered an interpretation of the Cinderella fairytale as one, which outlines the knowledge of the mythology of the goddess, suggesting that the relationship between the two cannot be fortuitous. [Baring and Cashford \(1993\)](#) suggest that whilst there has been a notable absence of the sacred image of nature -'the goddess,' within the orthodox Judaeo-Christian religions, the new age that is dawning may introduce a growing recognition of the plight of the feminine archetype. The Cinderella fairytale may have served to personify the aspects of feminine values for so long relegated to the role of servant and in need of rescue, thus covertly carrying the image of the goddess through the ages until such time as the need for it could become conscious, ([Baring and Cashford 1993](#)). The life of Diana, Princess of Wales has been likened by many within the tabloids as following a similar course to the famous fairytale, as through marrying her prince, Diana it is argued introduced a magical element to the Royals, ([Rosenblum 1997](#); [Smith 1999](#); [Paglia 1994](#)). This shy blushing teenager was reportedly pushed around by both blood and step relations, such as her bossy sister Sarah, her ruthless step-mother Raine and then the snippy female royals, all of whom criticised and outwitted her, ([Paglia 1994](#); [Rosenblum 1997](#)). These characters were however, all destined to change positions within the

scenario, all being relegated to play the 'ugly sister' role to Diana's Cinderella, ([McGuigan 2000](#)).

1.5

[Ingram \(2000\)](#) argues that whilst the Goddess may have been an undercover source of interest within the general consumer market for some time she is also being increasingly addressed by scholars within the diverse discipline of feminism who regard her as a source of empowerment. Also seen by many as a feminist icon, Diana, Princess of Wales, may have been viewed as a role model for young women under the age of forty, who as a single mother was trying to carve out a new life following a broken marriage, ([Richards, Wilson & Woodhead 1999](#)). However some academic feminists such as Beatrix [Campbell \(1998\)](#) produced literary works that possibly canonise Diana as a feminine heroine, a symbol of modern independent womanhood victimised by male patriarchy and a reactionary royal establishment. Nevertheless, the astonishing public reaction to her death indicated that Diana had appeal that very noticeably, was not only to women or ethnically restricted, but instead she appeared to become a trans-racial, trans-cultural icon of our time, ([Lomax 1999](#); [McGuigan 2000](#)). It is this 'Diana Phenomenon' - the notion that Princess Diana probably became the most publicly prominent woman in the world through her adoration by the global masses, which has led to the writing of this work, paralleling this woman's acquired public persona with that of the Goddess, ([Paglia 1994](#); [Rosenblum 1997](#)).

1.6

Like Botticelli's painting *Birth of Venus*, which depicts his tall, golden-haired, blue-eyed, pale-faced love Goddess just risen from the sea-foam, Lady Diana Spencer who shared many of the same physical attributes as Botticelli's Venus, emerged into the public eye amid a sea of media publicity, ([Graves 1967](#); [Campbell 1998](#)). [Leick \(1991\)](#) suggests that the goddess, in modern times, is perhaps best known for her role in portraying an image of beauty along with epitomising the true essence of womanhood and Lady Diana Spencer arguably delivered nothing less. The tall, slim, beautiful Diana emerged into the media like an English rosebud and slowly blossomed before the public's eyes into a multi-textured flower, ([Blackwell 1998](#)). Whilst contemporary society seemingly only wants to offer the aged woman her pension cheque, placing emphasis upon the female ideal of youth, beauty and sexuality, Diana seemingly drew the world into her magical allure, and was perhaps representative of the culturally created 'ideal' for women to aspire to, ([Wood & Dindier 1998](#), [Blackwell 1998](#), [Hefner 2001](#)). There she stood upon the 'world stage' with her luminous style and contemporary head-turning elegance ready to have a multitude of folktales, courtesy of the media, attached to her name and thus create the mythical historical figure we know today, ([Blackwell 1998](#); [Leick 1991](#)). [Leick \(1991\)](#) believes that such myths have a paradigmatic function, as they offer a connection between the known and the unknown, the past and the present, the world of the goddess and the world of humankind. Thus a 'goddess' such as Diana is allowed to exist in the 'real' world of cult worship, performed through meticulously following the events of her life (and death), outlined within a plethora of available media genres, ([Leick 1991](#)). Such genres include radio, television and magazine and newspaper literature that have provided, and continue to provide, a rich source of information about our deity which, in a country such as Britain, probably everyone without exception makes use of on a daily basis, ([Scannell 2000](#)).

1.7

[Oosten \(1985\)](#) asserts that the cosmic order of the goddess was often closely associated with regality, as many royal dynasties in history, such as the Sumerian Civilization, ca 4000 BC, have claimed divine ancestry. Like the goddesses inherited from Old Europe such as Greek Artemis; Roman Diana and Irish Brigit, Diana

1.8

Princess of Wales was more than just a 'Venus,' who offered prosperity - she was, like them, a 'lady' and a 'queen' (albeit only metaphorically), ([Gimbutas 1989](#)). Princess Diana

perhaps followed in the footsteps of her ancient goddess predecessors, whose images are still present in our art, literature and myths despite their official dethronement when "*numinosity was transferred from the Mother Goddess to the Father God*", (cited in [Baring & Cashford 1991](#) p273). Like them she remained the public's 'Queen of Hearts' despite being shunned by the royal family, when on her divorce from Prince Charles she was stripped of the title 'Her Royal Highness', ([Gimbutas 1989](#); [Campbell 1998](#); [Gee & Bhatia 1997](#)).

1.9

[Hefner \(2001\)](#) outlines that whilst the Goddess may be seen by humankind as possessing many facets, names and aspects, within Neo-paganism she is mainly worshipped in her aspects of the triple Goddess: *Virgin, Mother and Crone*.

1.10

The first aspect of the goddess, 'the virgin' title dates back to around Grecian times, when the 'Holy Virgin' title, was given to the harlot priestesses of Ishtar, Asherah and Aphrodite, whose function was to give forth the Goddesses grace and love by sexual worship; to heal; to prophesy, to perform sacred dances and to become brides of God, ([Hefner 2001](#)). The writer believes that there is perhaps an analogy between this first aspect of the goddess and the concept that the only thing that Diana was allowed to bring to her royal marriage was her body, ([Campbell, 1998](#)). The royal family's pragmatic and political requirement was that the sexual act should be perpetrated upon a royal bride only by the heir to the throne and since Diana had denied herself such experience, she was in their eyes unspoilt and thus ideal, ([Campbell 1998](#)). Diana was described by academic feminists, such as Ailbhe Smyth, as the 'virgin of the century', as they argued that Diana, photographed in the kindergarten where she worked, exuded the image of a virgin whose identity would soon metamorphose into motherhood -her virginity was perceived by them as a prized prelude to maternity, ([Campbell 1998](#)).

1.11

The second aspect of the goddess is that of mother and among the many names she is known by, she often has the name of 'Mother Goddess' ascribed to her, as this encapsulates the life-giving, nourishing and regenerative powers of the universe that are associated with the goddess, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#); [Hefner 2001](#)). Princess Diana, of course played a very important part in her role as a life-giver, as she was of course to become the mother of a future king, providing the monarchy with a highly valued heir and possibly fulfilling the requirements expected of her by the Windsor dynasty, ([Lomax 1999](#)). [Cohen \(1994\)](#) discusses the concept that this English rose was perhaps responsible for adding a touch of 'Britishness' back into the monarchy. She was after all the third daughter of Viscount Althorp, the late Earl Spencer, who was linked by blood to Charles II, and the Dukes of Marlborough, Abercorn and Devonshire and as such, perhaps offered an arguably much needed transfusion of an English blood line into the Saxe-Coburg- Gotha clan, known as the Royal Family, ([Morton 1993](#); [McGuigan 2000](#)). Diana served the Royal establishment well as she ensured that patriarchal primogeniture prevailed, feeling a reported sense of relief on giving birth to her babies and finding that they were boys, ([Campbell 1998](#)). Scholars from the sociological discipline such as Michael [Billig \(1992\)](#) have stressed the symbolic, psychological and theatrical role of the constitutional monarchy in Britain and how it represents the unity of a multinational state and arguably British identity:

'Monarchy adds a unique dimension to the country (England as Britain). Remove monarchy and you remove the very things, which distinguish this country from other countries. England/Britain would cease to be like England/Britain, (cited in [McGuigan 2000](#), p6).

Thus it may be argued that if the British monarchy is deemed representative of national identity, Diana turned England/Britain into a trans-national identity through her global

appeal as a 'touchable royal' who possessed an unusually 'not so stiff upper lip', ([Rosenblum 1997](#)). Diana's death occurred at a time when Britain appeared to be experiencing a crisis of identity as the millennium approached, with home rule for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland threatening the final demise of the British Empire, ([Richards, Wilson & Woodhead 1999](#); [McCrone et al 1998](#)). However, [Richards, Wilson & Woodhead \(1999\)](#) argue that even in death, Diana offered a sense of unity for Britain quite like no other, as the public mourning of a nation, possibly resulted in a temporary sense of reversed national fragmentation.

1.12

Perhaps the most feared aspect of the goddess, 'the crone', was known in ancient and primitive societies as the 'mother's curse' as the purpose of the crone's curse was to inevitably doom its victim, ([Hefner 2001](#)). This curse alone with its destructive ability was viewed as the feared destroyer aspect of the goddess, ([Hefner 2001](#)). Feminist writer Beatrix [Campbell \(1998\)](#), theorises that Diana's stand against her treatment by Charles and the Royals in general, which took the form of her famous *Panorama* interview (1995) and the book *DIANA, Her True Story* (1993), shook the Royals to their very core. Without the need to don the trademark protective gloves worn by the Royals, Diana publicly hugged and cuddled not only her two sons, but also numerous others, regardless of their colour, class or whether they had AIDS or leprosy, ([Rosenblum 1997](#)). [Hames and Leonard \(1998\)](#), assert that Diana developed an alternative court to the existing monarchy, which became increasingly independent of the formal procedures and ingrained assumptions of the institution. [Critchley \(1999\)](#) believes that it is possible that Diana's popular public persona may well have placed a curse upon the Monarchy, as we know it, as her alternative royal methods may have served to highlight the dissonance between the royals and the society of the 1990's. The royal family, including the Queen and Prince Charles, perhaps had to accept that Diana was far more popular than they were, although they eventually inherited one distinct advantage over this problematic young woman, in that they survived to fight another day, ([McGuigan 2000](#)). Following her death this emotionally introverted and detached strange bunch were called into question, appearing to have to partake in a quest to humanise themselves in order to ensure survival, with Prince Charles seemingly re-inventing himself as a kisser of everyone from babies to Spice girls, ([McGuigan 2000](#)).

1.13

[Oosten \(1985\)](#) highlights that within mythology, gods and goddesses are frequently associated with assuming an identity that is often viewed as very human, sharing many of the same fears and passions, and often subjected to the same processes of birth and death. Many commentators like [Wilson \(1999\)](#) and [Cameron \(1998\)](#), theorise that Diana's phenomenal following was because, like a family melodrama seen within many of today's soap operas, this woman's life unfolded before the masses via practically all the media genres. Thus despite never meeting the princess, almost everyone across the globe felt as though they knew her, ([Brunt 1999](#)). The media coverage of Diana's life story included many, often not so glamorous events like, suicide attempts, betrayal, adultery, bulimia and an untimely death, all of which served to gain the empathy of the general public, ([McGuigan 2000](#)). Diana's self-proclaimed faults and foibles, her inadequacies, her alleged limited intelligence and so on, possibly made her an effective mirror for a million identifications, ([Wilson 1999](#)). In times of such life adversity like the mother goddess who took her energy from natural sources such as the sun and moon, Diana Princess of Wales also sought inspiration from astrologists and spiritual advisors to try to improve the quality of her life, ([Gimbutas 1989](#); [Heelas 1999](#)). It is possibly this human touch, her public displays of affection, her willingness to speak out about her problems and her willingness to try far from conventional methods to search for her 'inner' spirituality that made her strike such a chord with so many across the globe, ([Wilson 1999](#), [Heelas 1999](#)).

1.14

Some commentators such as [Cameron \(1998\)](#) suggest that the multiple facets of Diana's

personae, whether loved or hated, were perhaps nothing more than a media projection, a carefully manipulated image created to touch sensitive nerves and to sell newspapers. Diana, Princess of Wales, possibly offered the world a goddess to call their own, as through the mass consumption of her media image, she could be observed attempting to deliver us from the evil which threatened the planet and 'her children' alike, such as disease, poverty and the legacies of war, ([Baring & Cashford 1993](#)). Diana 'the goddess' was perhaps however, only ever a product of the very media that exploited her, ([Richards, Wilson & Woodhead 1999](#)). She was possibly a culturally produced glamorous woman who acquired celebrity status, and who like many female deities before, whether they actually existed or not, had her saintly image 'manufactured' for her, and then frozen forever through the eye of the camera lens, ([Roth 1998](#)). It may be perhaps argued however, regardless of how her status was acquired, Diana appeared to use her powers well, realising that her status offered her the opportunity to do things to promote causes, rather than just open buildings and hold garden parties, ([Hames & Leonard 1998](#)). Through the coverage of her humanitarian exploits, Diana's public role as the head of a number of charities and her work with the sick, children, AIDS patients and victims of landmines possibly encapsulated or galvanised a sense of spiritual feeling that epitomised the essence of the goddess religion, ([Richards, Wilson & Woodhead 1999](#)). [Paglia \(1994\)](#) argues that as Diana probably became the most popular image in the world today, her story obviously tapped into certain deep and powerful strains within our culture, which turned her into a modern cult celebrity who appeared to stimulate atavistic religious emotions.

1.15

As 'globalization' perhaps threatens the individuality of human existence in general, through the ever increasing production of 'for anyone goods' which carry a stamp of sameness around the globe, there is perhaps a powerful sublimated longing by humankind for some meaning and depth to be attached to our existence, ([Tomlinson 1997](#); [Vasquez & Marquardt 2000](#)). The Diana phenomenon might possibly be explained as a desperate response in a postmodern time of disenchantment and anxiety about world events, which included the dawning of a new millennium and the insecurity of the unknown that this brought with it, ([Vasquez & Marquardt 2000](#)). Diana's glamorous iconography, her celebrity status and her public appeal, whether manufactured or otherwise, may have served to recreate the motherly caring role of the 'mother goddess', thus providing an escape from the threats of modernity, taking us back to a more natural, nurturing pre-modern existence, ([Vasquez & Marquardt 2000](#); [Belzen 1999](#)). Princess Diana perhaps provided an alternative to worshipping an unknown faceless entity - from speaking words into a void and addressing a 'someone' from whom no answer is expected, yet claiming that the experience fills life with meaning, ([Belzen 1999](#)). Commentators such as [Johnson \(1998\)](#) believe that Diana's life and her image are seen to have stood for something that had been lacking in the lives of her followers, whether it be generosity, emotionalism, communal spirit or love, she possibly offered 'the meaning' on which it is believed the psychology of religion is based. This can perhaps be explained in the sense that she appeared to care about her fellow human being and made efforts to help them, regardless of their geographical location, thus possibly enshrining values to which huge numbers of people made - and continue to make obeisance, ([Rosenblum 1997](#); [Belzen 1999](#)). [Johnson \(1998\)](#) asserts that Diana's short life perhaps did more to promote religious values in this country than the Christian church has done in more than half a century. [Richards, Wilson and Woodhead \(1999\)](#) possibly support this concept through defining a saintly life as '*one in which compassion for the other, irrespective of cost to the saint, is the primary trait*', (cited p 4). Like the images of the ancient goddesses which have survived the ages as artefacts such as sculptures, figurines and pictorial paintings, images of Diana were endlessly reproduced in the form of postage stamps, coins and media photographs, perhaps serving to offer a focal point of worship for our contemporary deity, ([Gimbutas 1989](#); [Richards, Wilson & Woodhead 1999](#)). Her cult following possibly paying homage to our contemporary goddess Diana, through the consumption of any commodity that bears her emblem - through purchasing stamps, records, newspapers and magazines, ([Wilson 1999](#)).

1.16

During the course of this piece of work, the writer firstly offered a definition of 'a goddess,' and then went on to discuss how the worshipping of female deities appeared within a number of differing cultures, spanning vast territory and time, only to then seemingly disappear and be replaced by the patriarchal religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism we know today. The second aim of this piece of work was to parallel the public adoration experienced by the late Diana, Princess of Wales, with that of the goddess, possibly demonstrating that the goddess religion is alive and well within contemporary society. During the discussion, the writer outlined theories from a number of disciplines that included those of feminism, sociology and psychology to assist the writer in theorising that Diana possibly became a goddess of our time.

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