

Patriarchy on Trial

Loretta Biasutti & Carolyn Pogue

Musician enters and begins overture 5 minutes before curtain time.

Narrator enters, stands at podium and surveys audience a moment.

Narrator:

Thank heavens you are here! Thank you for coming! I **need** to talk with you about something that's been bothering me. It's this:

When I was walking down a street in my neighbourhood last fall, I was flabbergasted to see an effigy of an old woman hanging from a tree. She was dressed in black, had long grey hair. Big chains hung around her neck. Her mouth was open in a silent scream.

Then I looked around. I saw that next to this woman was a Halloween decoration! She was supposed to be funny! **But.** *pause* What is so funny about a woman being tortured and hung in a tree?

So, you can see why I needed to talk about this, right? I'm wondering — what irrational impulse is driving the way society works today? *pause* Could it be the patriarchy? *decisively* **Patriarchy!** *pause*

I know. Some of you may be thinking, "Yeah, let's really sock it to 'em." And some may be thinking. "Oh-oh, here it comes! A bunch of man-haters ready to knock down every guy on the planet."

But no. This play is not about blaming men for all the ills of the world. Men suffer from patriarchal systems, too. More men than women are lonely, suffer from drug abuse and die by suicide. Patriarchy serves no gender, colour, age or ability.

Patriarchy! What do I even mean by that old-fashioned word? It's a way of organizing society based on competition, not co-operation; control, not collaboration. If you win, I lose. If I have more power, then **I** can control what you deserve to have.

It's a system of society in which a few people, usually elite men, hold power. Does this sound familiar? Elite men, but sometimes elite women, too. I live in Alberta...

I can think of a symbol of this in my own life. When I was a kid, my father was the head of the household. We were reminded of this every time we sat down for dinner because he sat the head of the table. Even though my mother was a professional nurse who made life and death decisions at work, she bowed to my father's power at home.

There are lots of signs, eh? My friend heard this one regularly from her dad: "Woman! Get me a beer!" Yuck.

But, you might ask, isn't it natural and universal that men, who are often bigger and stronger, should have more power and privilege than women?

No! In fact, in most prehistoric societies, women and men shared tasks and power — and honoured Nature, upon whom all life depends. Some egalitarian societies still exist today, for example, among the Haudenosaunee [*pronounce* Hoe-den-o-SHOW-nee] or Six Nations Confederacy in the US and eastern Canada. *pause*

Ever since I saw that martyred woman hanging, I've been thinking a lot about patriarchal systems that have brought us to this moment in time.

Friends. Last night I had the strangest dream.

SFX: *chimes*

gestures There was a stage — just about like this one. Three witnesses and a court clerk were there.

Witnesses and Court Clerk enter and take their seats.

There was a podium and an obelisk. *Walk to it.* In my dream....

SFX: *chimes*

I studied the symbols on the obelisk... guns, jock strap, nuclear mushroom cloud, money, whalebone corset, Doctrine of Discovery... but it was the judge's gavel that provided the clue that I was in a court room! But then I wondered — who was on trial?

And then, like a fist on a Friday night, it hit me! *Returns to podium.* The symbols were of patriarchal power. So, it was the patriarchy on trial. Finally!

Tonight, I invite you into my dream court.

SFX *chimes.*

I ask you to serve as the jury. Are you up for this? *pause*
This is what happened....

Narrator leaves the stage.

Court Clerk (CC):

stands and bangs gavel on board 3 times.

Hear ye! Hear ye! This court is now in session!

Witnesses, please rise. *they rise*

holding up a box of chocolates tied with a bright ribbon Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth on this Fair Trade box of chocolates?

Witnesses all together:

Sure! Why wouldn't we? Of course. Yes! What a question! Etc.

CC:

I call the first witness.

Eve goes to the witness stand/podium, others sit down.

CC:

State your full name.

Eve:

Eve.

CC:

Your **full** name.

Eve:

Eve. They didn't bother to give me another name.

CC:

Let the record show that Eve Anonymous is the first witness. Place of birth?

Eve:

The Garden.

CC:

What do you want to say to the esteemed members of the jury? Please don't be shy.

Eve:

"Shy" has never been a problem for me. I'm the one who talked to the snake, remember? However, being shut up, shut away, silenced, lied about and violated — for 3,000 years — now *that* has been a very big problem for me., *gestures to the audience* — and all who came after me.

Do you remember when you were a kid and there was something you really needed to say? Remember when some big person told you, "No! It's a secret! Don't talk! Don't bother me. Don't tell. Just shut right up!" Remember? It was kind of like that. And — I was not a child — actually, I was **never** a child!

CC:

Proceed. *returns to seat.*

Eve:

Esteemed members of the jury, regardless of what you have heard in your churches, synagogues and mosques around the world and throughout the eons, it was not **my** fault. *pause* Just a recap here:

Men wrote the story about how Mr. ManGod made a man, put him to sleep and made **me** out of his rib. **Hell—o! As if!**

Then the snake and I had a thing. Next, I picked the forbidden fruit of knowledge, the man followed along and **zap!** We were thrown out of the Garden forever.

And, so the story goes, because I was a bad girl, all women forever have been cursed with painful child birth — *sarcastically* — as if there had been a plan for an easy child birth? hah! — and, men are always on top! That was almost the end of the story, but there was more. There is **always** more.

Because Mr. ManGod was jealous, Mother Earth, Gaia, Isis, Pachamama, Frigga, Kali — and all the other goddesses were cursed, too.

So that's how it was and that's how it is. Men gave themselves power over everything. "Bad old Eve." All my fault because I reached for knowledge. Maybe you know what I mean? Sing along with me. You'll find the words in your programme.

Sings "It Had to be Me"

Tune: It Had to be You (Jones & Kahn, 1924)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

It had to be me,
The blame is on me.
I talked to the snake
I ate from the tree
The blame is on me.

Sure, Eden was great —
With nary a chore
But give me a break

A bit of a bore —
I hungered for more.

It had to be me
The blame is on me.
It's knowledge I craved
So call me depraved,
Don't blame it on me!

CC: *standing*

But Eve Anonymous, surely that old blame story doesn't matter today. Aren't women also cared for and protected by the patriarchy?

Eve:

Protected **from** the patriarchy **by** the patriarchy? Don't make me laugh. Listen, I've been floating around in the minds and hearts of storytellers, artists and rule-makers for 3,000 years. We're talking the Iron Age, you know? I've been kept alive this way and sister, I've seen it all.

The patriarchy has used me as an excuse to denigrate, humiliate, exclude and violate. Still does. Violence has become **normal**!

CC:

Yes, well, thank you for this compelling testimony. Now, I would....

Eve:

I'm **NOT** finished! Protection? Ha! Only 500 years ago, we were in the throes of the European witch trials.

CC:

But that is **old** history.

Eve:

In some countries, there are still witch hunts. And, there is the Taliban today.

But speaking of history — sure. There was the Renaissance, Age of Enlightenment and then we run into that diabolical Doctrine of Discovery! Look how that worked for everyone except elite men! It didn't!

Today's violent society couldn't have been created without subjecting, killing, torturing sterilizing and raping women and violating Mother Earth. And the men who spoke out and stood up for us were silenced.

Two steps forward, one step back.... Have you read the news lately!? Quite a little line dance, eh? We finally have safe houses for women, but they are always underfunded. We finally recognize spousal assault as a crime, but it's still hard to get a conviction.

One hundred Canadian women and girls go missing or are murdered every year, and don't you wonder? Where **are** the missing? in a forest? in a landfill site? Sold to the highest bidder?

No. There is nothing about the patriarchy that is **not** violent.

CC:

Eve Anonymous, you have given strong testimony about violence and the patriarchy....

Eve:

I am **still NOT** finished!

When violence permeates our world, sliding it into society disguised as entertainment, when newscasts focus primarily on it, when sports celebrate it, violence seems normalized. For many, it's hardly noticeable any more. But I notice it.

I notice it!

CC:

gently Eve Anonymous, is there anything more you would like to add?

Eve:

Only this. *holds up apple* Patriarchy can just kiss my apple! *Slaps her fanny and sits*

CC:

I call the next witness. *Emma goes to the witness stand.* State your name please.

Emma:

Emma Amethyst.

CC:

Place of birth?

Emma:

Where the healing herbs grow.

CC:

Thank you. Please proceed with your testimony. *returns to seat*

Emma:

First, I want to ask this honourable jury if, when you walked here, you noticed the herbs underfoot? Such bounty! Myself, I was delighted to be able to find Queen Anne's lace. Now I can make a potion with the seeds for my countrywoman Elizabeth. She has had ample children, and does not wish for more.

You look puzzled. Do you wonder how I know about birth control, even though I am from the Middle Ages? I learned from my mother, and my mother's mother, and my ancestors going back to ancient times, wise women who came before me.

The townspeople come to me to cure their stomach complaints, their aching joints, their headaches. And women come to me in secret, seeking some control over their bodies.

But not everyone in the village appreciates my wisdom — the feudal lords, the priests and their officers fear my power. This happened all over the world, not just in Europe, where I am from.

Would you sing along with me?

Sings: My Best Healing Things

Tune: My Favourite Things (Rogers & Hammerstein, 1959)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

Ginkgo and willow and ergot and chamomile
Basil and feverfew, mint, flax and yarrow.
Herbs that I find near rivers and springs,
These are a few of my best healing things.

When the dog bites,
When the bee stings,
When the baby's due,
I simply provide all my care and my love
And I will be there for you.

We are considered a challenge to power of
men in the clergy and newly-trained doctors.
“Sex with the devil!” is their explanation for
Skills we perfected in each generation.

They say, “**witch**-es”
They say, “**e**-vil”
But we're **wo-men** true,
We are mistrusted by powers-that-be,
But someday we'll get our due!

We wise women began to be considered more and more as a threat to the power of the state and church... well... let me tell you what happened to me...

The day they burned my mother at the stake, I prayed and prayed for rain, but no rain came. They brought her from the prison, her hands bound, a rope around her waist tied her to the ones ahead and behind her. Our eyes met. “Bless you, *liebchen*, ” she said. “Be strong!” and then the soldiers poked her in the back to make her move faster. Faster toward where the wood was piled in the town square. Faster toward the poles that stood waiting for the men to bind the prisoners to them, before lighting the kindling.

“Come,” my auntie said. “We can do no more for her now.” And we left, leaving behind all the stories my mother would have told, all the teachings she would have given, all the songs she would have sung. *pause*

Of course, I was not the only child left this way. Over 300 years, they executed tens of thousands of us... mostly women like my mother — healers, gardeners, foragers, midwives, women who helped people die with dignity. *Sighs deeply.*

Excuse me. Let me leave that sad time. *turns her back to audience, removes shawl, puts on nurse’s cap*

CC:

Will you continue?

Emma:

Oh, yes! When healing becomes more organized, we aren’t allowed to go to medical school. Oh, we **can** become nurses, providing loving care, but only following orders of a male doctor. Our historical teachings are discredited or co-opted by western medicine. The willow bark we ancients used for millennia to treat aches and pains becomes Aspirin. The foxglove tea that we brewed for heart conditions become digoxin.

That’s all well and good, but were we, and other Indigenous healers, given credit for such discoveries? No, we were not. I rest my case.

Emma turns, removes cap and long skirt to reveal casual trousers. As she does this, CC stands.

CC:

Ma'am? Are you still here? What's happening?

Emma:

Give me a minute. I have to time travel to another century.... Alright, where are we these days?

When I turned 18 in 1967, the second wave of the feminism movement was at its height, focusing on reproductive rights and sexual equality. 13 million women around the world were using the birth control pill. When I was 22, I want to join them! *pause*

But my Catholic doctor had another idea. He would not prescribe the pill until I gave him a firm wedding date. In his mind, this precaution would prevent me from having sex before the holy sacrament of marriage. *smirks* Bless his little heart.

I remember Heather. We met in first year university. She was bright, capable and funny. But she was also unlucky. She became pregnant. Heather had to appear before a **committee** of doctors and convince them that she was mentally unstable so that she could have an abortion.

And another thing. When I was expecting my daughter Sarah, I was less concerned about the process of labour and delivery than I was about the routine shaving and episiotomy that had helped turn childbirth into a medical procedure. As it happened, Sarah popped out in no time, so I didn't have to argue about any of that.

AND! What is it with all this concern about feminine "hygiene"? And why did it take until 2023 to admit that women athletes might actually be having a period and might leak a little?

And vaginal deodorants — really? Shaving pubic hair? Let me be clear: menstruation, masturbation and menopause are not medical problems for the patriarchy to treat, perfume, clean up, clip or medicate!

CC:

loudly Madam! **please** watch your language! There may be **patriarchs** in the audience!

Emma:

See what I mean? Normal everyday “lady functions” are considered rude to discuss — even though we can talk about **Viagara** until the cows come home!

We are supposed to fit in to some crazy ideal of what a woman should look like, the stereotypical Barbie — not too fat, not too thin, certainly not too old and definitely not bloody!

CC

Madam!

Emma:

And don’t get me started on the **ANTI**-social media where young girls are pressured to act and look a certain way. And where they are taught that boys expect oral sex. And another thing, what about the girl’s pleasure? In my day, so-called free love was **not** a one-way street!

I’m going to ask you good folks of the jury a question: is your second toe longer than your big toe? That’s called Morton’s toe. I’ve got Morton’s toe, and I’m completely fine with that. But can you believe that it is possible to have toe-shortening surgery to make your foot look *air quotes* better?

It’s sometimes called a Cinderella procedure. All that so we can wear stilettos?! Enough said!

And **wait!** Did you know that you can also have cosmetic surgery to have your labia shortened, to make your vulva look “better”? Please do not check yours until you get home.

CC:

horrified No!

Emma:

Please, sing along with me.

Sings: Leave my Wrinkled Face Alone
(Pogue, 2023)

Leave my wrinkled face alone.
I love all the lines its grown
You can cut and paste your **own** face
Stitch-a **bum** up in its place but
Leave my wrinkled face alone!

Leave my lovely breasts alone.
I don't need your silicone.
I don't want your pokey wire
To lift them ever higher
I like how my breasts have grown.

Leave my labia alone.
Your opinion is very over-blown
Whether smooth or long or bitty
I think they're very pretty
I'm fond of the ones I own.

Now, where was I? Oh, yes. The back-in-the-day-restrictions on our personal choices. Since then, there has been a lot of legislation on human rights, for example reproductive rights and 2SLGBTQI+ rights that has let us settle into a **dangerous** complacency. (Although we are seeing signs of The Handmaid's Tale come to life in some places.)

But surely now you'd think that patriarchy is dead and we could forget about the bad old days? Now that most males no longer need to go out on the hunt to provide game for the village? Now that many women have some control over their reproduction, and now that household tasks are less labour intensive? And, now that more of us can benefit from more life choices?

Surely **now** patriarchy is dead?

No. The systems of power passed from generation to generation still continue to favour cisgender men as the locus of influence, with everybody else needing to be controlled.

Think of the current threats to queer and trans communities. Homosexuality was decriminalized in Canada way back in 1969, yet folks with diverse sexual orientation or gender diversity are under attack again.

Patriarchy endures. It endures like a great ugly wart that just keeps coming back. I don't have a cure for that yet, but it's time to get rid of it!

Emma returns to her seat.

CC

I call the final witness.

SFX: *a few bars of the theme song "Working 9 to 5" as*

Jane *slowly rises, and checking her cell phone, walks slowly to the podium then checks her watch.*

Jane:

Oh no! *turns to CC* I hope this won't take too long? I'm so sorry, but it's already 5:00 o'clock. I have to pick up the kids soon...

.....and then there's laundry and I've still got this report to finish.

Hmmmmmm Maybe I can work on it after I make dinner?

Wait! Wasn't there a thing we had to do tonight? Did I need a babysitter?
raises phone and scrolls

CC:

Ahem! If I could have your attention please? I need you to state your name. Please.

Jane:

What? Oh. Sorry. Jane. Jane Doe.

CC:

Let the record show that Jane Doe is our final witness. Place of birth?

Jane:

Everywhere.... *checks cell phone again and talks to herself*. Well, so much for that. I forgot we were having dinner with Ted and Alice tonight. I'd better check to be sure the babysitter is still available. I'll work on the report after we get home.... it will be another late night for me...

CC:

Ms Doe?

Jane:

Oh! I'm so sorry. I'm focussing now. Really. I'm right here.

CC

You have been called to testify against the patriarchy and....

Jane:

Yup. It's just another day in the life of Wonder Woman....

Why do I always feel like I am running but getting nowhere? I have a job that I love, but was passed over for the last round of promotions after my maternity leave. I feel like I'm smashing my head against the glass ceiling. And it hurts!

I have children I love, but I feel guilty that I don't spend enough so-called quality time with them. It all gets reduced to "brush your teeth," "do your homework" and "time for bed."

I have a partner I love, but I'm too tired for conversation — never mind sex! Life, eh? *to the jury* Well, let me tell you what my life is like! Will you sing along with me?

Sings: I am Working, always Working

Tune: I've been Working on the Railroad (Traditional, 1800s)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

I am working, always working,
All the live-long day
I am working, always working
For substandard pay.

I am working in the kitchen,
In the nursery, too
But when I want to work the board room
Challenges ensue.

Women gotta know
We all gotta know
Women gotta toot their ho—o-rns.
Catharine and Alice
Rosalin and Maude
Harriet and Jedy Lamarr.

Can't you hear the choices calling?
"Please give me my due!"
All those names that I'm recalling,
Wo-men strong and true.

Sci'n-tists are working in the labs-o,
Artists are working in the halls
Women forgotten and refus-ed
Names that we should know.

Singin' fee, fie, fiddly-i-o
Fee, fie, fiddly-i-o-o-o
Fee, fie, fiddly-i-o—
Give us what you owe!

CC:

Ms Doe! If I could have your attention for a moment?

Jane:

staring out at audience

Who was the fool who taught us that we could have it all? Not now, not the way our society works. *She puts down her cell phone.*

to the audience Now, don't get me wrong. I **am** a feminist.

CC:

These witnesses have been difficult, so... *throws up her hands and sits down*

Jane:

I do know my herstory. It was feminist activist in the late 1800s who marched for the vote and property rights. That was the first wave.

In the 1960s and 70s, the feminist agenda was reproductive rights and equal pay for equal work. This was part of a whole wave of change: civil rights, peace, gay rights, Indigenous rights, eco-justice.

SFX: *musician plays one or two bars of "If I had a Hammer"*

Jane: And the third and fourth waves are exposing the additional inequality faced by women marginalized by race, culture, class, sexual or gender identity.

But all these waves have not yet floated us to a place where women and men and all genders have equal opportunity to be our best selves and to be safe. Further, not everyone has my unearned advantage as an educated cisgendered, well-off citizen.

You know, I have some questions:

Why is there not more study on the benefits of a universal basic income?

Why aren't there child care spaces in every workplace?

Why can't my partner **or** I take parental leave for new or sick children without it affecting our jobs?

Why isn't it an equally valid choice to stay home and make crafts with the kids or do volunteer work for the Alberta Wilderness Association, for example — or, not to have kids at all?

Why is it that, at the current pace, we'll wait 50 years before there is legal gender equality everywhere?

.... hmm. Now, where did I read that?

CC:

rising Ms Doe? Ms Doe?

Jane is oblivious, searching frantically for that gender equality article. It was from the World Bank Report, I think... Oh! Here it is: *reading*

“Governments cannot afford to sideline half of their population. Denying equal rights to women across the world is not only unfair to women, but is a barrier to countries' ability to promote green, resilient and inclusive development.”

to audience See? And that's from the World Bank, a patriarchal institution if ever there was one. Hah! *She stares at her screen again.*

CC:

Ms Doe. Have you finished your testimony?

Jane:

What? Oh. Right.

So, patriarchy is bad for the economy and bad for humanity.

Patriarchy is bad for Earth and water...

In other words, bad for all living things. *pause as she thinks about this.*

Wait! All living things. Well. I've just made an executive decision. I'm not going home after all. I am going to stay right here in this court room with all of you and see how this trial turns out.

Frank can pick up the kids and the sitter. He can go to dinner without me tonight. ... Wow. “bad for all living things.” *She returns to her seat and mimes calling Frank. Narrator approaches the stage unobtrusively to be ready for entrance.*

CC:

And now, are there any witnesses for the Defence?

All Witnesses:

standing, loudly **There IS no defence! There is NO defence!**

CC and Witnesses sit down.

Narrator:

Well, that was quite a dream. You can see that the charges against the patriarchy are dire, amongst other crimes, it is accused of:

Minimizing women and other genders, leading to violence.

Assuming control over women’s bodies.

Suppressing other people’s ability to achieve their potential.

As for the verdict, perhaps you will join me in a song...

Sings: If Patriarchy’s Guilty

Tune: If you’re Happy and you Know it (Traditional)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

If patriarchy’s guilty, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)

If patriarchy’s guilty, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)

If patriarchy’s guilty, if patriarchy’s guilty, if patriarchy’s guilty,

Clap your hands (*clap, clap*)

Let’s all work together, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)

Let’s all work together, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)

Let’s all work together, make the planet so much better,

If patriarchy’s guilty, clap your hands (*clap, clap*).

Narrator:

The jury has spoken, sung or clapped. But — my dream was not over yet!

SFX: *a funeral dirge until after the funeral wreath has been hung on the obelisk.*

CC holds funeral wreath high, solemnly crosses stage to hang it on obelisk. Narrator moves mics to the side; Jane moves podium to back of stage. then:

SFX: *happy, lively music as Jane and Emma move obelisk to front CS, open and raise it up, moving it slowly side to side.*

Narrator:

That's the transformation we need!

Witnesses cheer. Jane and Emma move obelisk back to lean against the podium. Cast lines up quickly, bows, then gestures to musicians who rise and bow. Then:

Eve:

But WAIT! We're not finished yet!

Narrator:

Now I can tell you the end of my dream. After I saw the glorious symbols of peace and justice, I saw that the jury had stayed in the court room. They spoke to their neighbours and shared their own dream for the Great Transformation. Please take a few moments to tell us: What's your dream?

After a few comments from the audience

Eve:

Thank you everyone. We're **ALMOST** finished! Please join us one more time!

Sings: A Better Way

Tune: La Cucaracha (traditional)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2025

We've all agreed on
A verdict here now
But there's more that we must do.

We all have a
Part to play now
Act with boldness, through and through.

We must all fight
To make things right
And we need to start today.

Write or protest
Act with kindness
And demand a better way.
We demand a better way!

End

