Is ‘God is a Woman’ from Ariana Grande Only a Song?

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ABSTRACT

‘God is a Woman’, the single from Ariana Grande, is a good excuse to remember that archeologists believe God was considered female for the first 200,000 years of human life on earth. This work examines what it has been and continues to be like for female to be more powerful than male in the world of all time.

Keywords : Ariana Grande; Archeology; Culture; Feminization; God is a Woman;

Introduction

“When all is said and done... You'll believe God is a Woman.” Ariana Grande declared, in a four octave vocal range, on July 12, 2018.^[1] From the pool of iridescent paint resembling the female anatomy, to the shot of the pop star suggestively straddling a globe, every candy-colored scene in the accompanying music video delivered a heaven-sent message: it's a woman's world.^[2] And, accordingly, the Internet erupted in feminist applause.^[3] Mike Nied of *Idolator* described it as a sexually liberated bop, “The beat picks up as [Ariana Grande, *acs*] moves into the chorus. Incorporating a hip-hop edge, her voice gets progressively breathier. Although the single is obviously a sexy banger, it also includes a resilient message. In the face of critics, she defiantly takes a stand.”^[4] Bryan Rolli of *Forbes.com* called it an impressive show of both virtuosity and restraint and one of the best pop songs of the summer—if not the year—nor praised Ariana Grande's vocal performance sprinkling her signature falsetto across the sultry chorus and reining in her vocal acrobatics in the verses.^[5] So, the question is, “Is ‘God is a Woman’ only a song?” This literature review highlights examines what it has been and continues to be like for female to be powerful in the matriarchal world. Our elaboration based on the context of theological history with archaeological evidence for the first 200,000 years of human life on earth.

‘God Is A Woman’ Video Decoded

There is a lot to digest in Ariana Grande's video for ‘God Is a Woman’, which was born on Friday July 13, 2018, and is packed with a head-spinning array of visual, pop culture and historical references.^[2] We are finding ourselves watching the video repeatedly, trying to pick up on the obvious and more subtle nods and special moments in the action-packed clip, which features 18 different looks for the singer. Between a vocal cameo by Madonna, a screaming gopher that seems destined for instant meme fame and allusions to significant religious paintings, the video is full of memorable moments. Here are the most special scenes from the dreamy drama that interlaces spirituality and sexuality.

1) The Galaxy Revolves Around Ariana (0:05)

For hardcore Arianators-Ariana Grande's fanbase, it might feel like the galaxy revolves around Ari. However in this video, the galaxy *literally spins* around her. Utilizing some slick visual effects, Ariana Grande sways her body back and forth, with the galaxy acting like a hula hoop around her.

Picture 1. The Galaxy Revolves Around Ariana (0:05)^[2]

2) Swimming In...Paint? (0:16)

Ariana Grande teased a picture on her Instagram of her laying naked in a pool of watercolor, and this look certainly didn't disappoint in the video. Throughout the journey, Ariana Grande waves her arms up and down, re-circulating and drifting the various colors around her body like giant Spin-Art toy.

Picture 2. Swimming In...Paint? (0:16)^[2]

3) Deflecting The Haters (0:51)

Taking a page out of book, Ariana Grande sits on a large book with various hateful words being thrown at her from small men standing on the pages of what looks like a French novel. Words such as ‘bitch’, ‘fake’, and ‘annoying’ are thrown at Ariana Grande, but never penetrate through. As such, she flexes her immunity to hate thrown her way online and in the press by those who assume they know who the ‘real’ Ariana Grande is.

Picture 3. Deflecting The Haters (0:51)^[2]

4) Harry Potter Reference (1:01)

Ariana Grande is a massive *Harry Potter* fan, so it would only make sense that she would include a possible reference to Fluffy, the three-headed dog from the first novel. Ariana Grande sings, “when you try and come for me I keep on flourishing” while moving towards the camera, with a tri-muzzle mutt howling from behind her head.

Picture 4. Harry Potter Reference (1:01)^[2]

5) Ariana Grande Emerges In A Flame (1:10)

Ariana Grande literally is on fire, or at least it appears that way in this soft-focus scene. The singer dances atop a thin wax candle, with the flame burning all around her, singing “you love it how I touch you,” giving a not-so-subtle visual reference to the heat of the intimate experience she's describing.

Picture 5. Ariana Grande Emerges In A Flame (1:10)^[2]

6) Screaming Gopher (1:43)

It's hard to get through this scene without laughing. The music abruptly stops after the first chorus, and suddenly several gophers pop out of their ground holes in a desert. One gopher looks at the camera, and starts screaming hysterically. The others then join in for what is sure to be a many meme'd scene.

Picture 6. Screaming Gopher (1:43)^[2]

7) Surprise Madonna Appearance, As God (2:28)

In arguably the most talked-about moment, the music stops yet again, with Ariana Grande holding a Thor-like hammer. Possible referencing the iconic 1984 Apple commercial, Ariana Grande seductively holds the weapon before throwing it up at the high cathedral ceilings, smashing the glass above.^[6] While this is happening, Ariana Grande mouths the famous Samuel L. Jackson monologue from Quentin Tarantino's 1994 film classic "Pulp Fiction."^[7] In an amazing pop culture moment, the Ezekiel 25:17 passage made famous by Jackson in the film is recited by Madonna, who talks down from above as God, commanding, "I will strike down upon thee, with great vengeance and furious anger, those who attempt to poison and destroy my sisters, and you will know my name is the lord, when I lay my vengeance upon you."^[8] Eagle-eyed fans will notice that "brothers" is swapped out for "sisters" in this case, adding to the track's ladies-first vibe. The surprise cameo settled our speculation about whether the two pop superstars were collaborating, after Ariana Grande posted a photo on July 11 thanking the 'Like A Prayer' singer, saying "you know why."^[9]

Picture 7. Surprise Madonna Appearance, As God (2:28)^[2]

8) Ariana Takes Us To Altar (3:25)

Taking into account the chanting-type vocals at the end of the song and the spiritual undertones, it's no surprise that towards the end of the video Ariana Grande leads what appears to be a massive choir. Dressed in white gowns, the dozens of singers put their hands in the air, praising nor worshipping Ariana Grande.

Picture 8. Ariana Takes Us To Altar (3:25)^[2]

9) Ariana Walks the Line (3:30)

In a surprising turn of events, Ariana Grande walks across a thin copper wire over a field, holding onto large planet balloons that seemingly help her defy gravity and float like a gymnast over the verdant scene.

Picture 9. Ariana Walks the Line (3:30)^[2]

10) Michaelangelo Buonarroti's *Creazione di Adamo* (3:47)

Ariana Grande ends the video paying tribute to *Creazione di Adamo* (English: The Creation of Adam, *acs*), a biblical representation of God giving life to the first man, Adam.^[10] The original Michaelangelo Buonarroti fresco from the circa 1512 can be seen on the dome of Vatican's Sistene Chapel, but Ariana Grande puts a new spin on the iconic image, cropping herself in as God.

Picture 10. Michaelangelo Buonarroti's *Creazione di Adamo* (3:47)^[2]

Evidence Says God Has Been A Woman

In the context of theological history, though, it's actually remarkable that Ariana Grande's assertion would make such a splash in 2018. True, female Gods have been considered heretical in many cultures for millennia, and the suggestion that God is anything other than an old, white man in the sky is, for some, still a deeply troubling thought. Just look at Harmonia Rosales's 2017 reimagining of Michelangelo Buonarroti's *Creazione di Adamo*, depicting both God and the first man as Black women, for proof that daring to widen religious imagery can cause serious uproar.^[11] But if we travel back to the ancient origins of human civilization, we find evidence that female deities were worshipped far and wide for millennia. Long before the main world religions were established, during the earliest periods of human development, many belief-systems venerated a supreme female creator.

Picture 11. Isis with Horus the Child^[13]

In *When God Was a Woman*, historian Merlin Stone traces ancient worship of the Goddess back to the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages.^[12] In the Near and Middle East, she writes, we can find evidence that the “development of the religion of the female deity in this area was intertwined with the earliest beginnings of religion so far discovered anywhere on earth.”

This Goddess was unquestionably the supreme deity to rule them all; “creator and law-maker of the universe, prophetess, provider of human destinies, inventor, healer, hunter and valiant leader in battle.”

It’s worth noting that many anthropologists believe these Upper Paleolithic societies are likely to have followed a matrilineal structure, meaning women held supreme status at the center of the household. Merlin Stone explains that these communities revered ancestor worship, whereby “the concept of the creator of all human life may have been formulated by the clan’s image of the woman who had been their most ancient, primal ancestor.” In other words, the Divine Ancestress. Indeed, anthropologists studying the rites and rituals of Paleolithic communities over the last two centuries have discovered countless stone figurines of pregnant women across Europe, the Middle East, and India—some dating back to 25,000 BC—that point to the worship of the divine feminine.^[14]

During this period in the ancient world, worship of female deities was widespread and immensely powerful. But it was with the advent of agriculture after the Paleolithic age that Goddess worship really started to take off. Statuettes from that period representing the Mother Goddess have cropped up in Canaan (now Palestine/Israel) and Anatolia (now Turkey), and Goddess figurines have appeared all over the Neolithic communities of Egypt dating back to 4000 BC. “The deifications of the Goddess in the ancient world were variations on a theme,” writes Lynn Rogers in *Edgar Cayce and the Eternal Feminine*, with representations of a supreme female Creator in Sumer, Egypt, Crete, Greece, Ethiopia, Libya, India, Elam, Babylon, Anatolia, Canaan, Ireland, Mesopotamia, and even ancient Judah and Israel.^[15] But there could be no doubt that She was, as mythologist Robert Graves described it, “immortal, changeless, omnipotent.”^[16]

In *Mother God*, Sylvia Browne offers a detailed history of the female principle that flourished after the Paleolithic period.^[17] The Inuit people had Sedna, the goddess of the sea and mother of the ocean, while the Assyrian and Babylonian cultures worshipped Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. In Aztec culture, Teleoinan was considered the Mother of the Gods. According to the ancient Egyptians, Isis was the goddess of children and magic, while in ancient Sumer, the primary goddess was Inanna, the goddess of love and war. Meanwhile, the ancient Phoenicians actually had two female goddesses of equal status: Anat, the fertility goddess, and Astarte, the Mother goddess considered to be the planet Venus. Creators of the universe, bearers of children, providers of culture, valiant warriors, and wise counsellors, these goddesses were anything but an afterthought.

When women rise to prominence, misogyny often ensues, and by 1500 BC, Goddess-worshipping civilizations had mostly fallen from grace. Scholarship differs in its analysis of why, but many experts assert that the dominant masculine religions and patrilineal customs brought to Europe by invading Indo-Europeans seriously upset the state of play. The suppression that followed makes for bleak reading. “At the dawn of Western civilization,” writes Lynn Rogers, “25,000 years of ‘her-story’ of the Goddess’ bountiful creativity were obliterated.”^[18] Creation myths were rewritten, symbols of Goddess worship were denigrated, and “the ancient belief in the Goddess as the Ground of Being, The Universe from which The All emerged, was overturned.”^[18]

Picture 12. Burney relief / Queen of the Night^[19]

As Judaism, Christianity, and Islam evolved in the Middle East and Europe, the monotheistic religions began to cement the worship of a new, exclusively male order: God, King, Priest, and Father. These new theologies placed the goddess in a subordinate status, with a man as her dominant husband, or even as her murderer. In her book, Merlin Stone writes at length about the erasure of female deities, arguing that at that time Goddess worship became the victim of “centuries of continual persecution and suppression by the advocates of the newer religions which held male deities as supreme.”^[20] Worse yet, this major about-turn in religion meant the status of women around the world declined, too.

Al-Qur'ān as the central religious text of Islam which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (Allāh), according to santri-scholar Nong Darol Mahmada, was dominated by the male perspective in its interpretation (*tafsīr*), which ultimately benefited the interests of men and disadvantaged women.^[21] She also noticed that the hadith, which became the source of the second Islam's source after *al-Qur'ān*, some *ulamā'* tend to transmit more misogynistic traditions (traditions that demean women). As a result, *fiqh* into patriarchal *fiqh*. While *fiqh* the body of Islamic law extracted from detailed Islamic sources which are studied in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and the process of gaining knowledge of Islam through jurisprudence. It seems that in Islam women are less valued than men, although this is certainly wrong based on Nong Darol Mahmada's opinion.

Not all religions that followed in the wake of Goddess worship obscured the female deity, though. In *The Path of the Mother*, Savitri L. Bess points out that Hindus have never stopped worshipping the Mother. “The Mother, who has been obscured in the shadow of Western religions for thousands of years,” she writes in chapter *The enduring presence of the divine feminine in Hinduism*, “is considered to be the sum total of the energy in the universe.”^[22] From Durga, the fearless goddess who vanquished her foes atop a tiger, to Saraswati, the four-armed guardian deity of knowledge, the vast spectrum of venerated Hindu goddesses highlight the power of the feminine principle, none more so than Shakti, the divine force sometimes called “The Great Mother.” There are multiple expressions of Shakti, Bess notes, though her cosmic energy is entirely responsible for the creation of the universe; she is “known to be the activity in all things, the great power that creates and destroys, the primordial essence, the womb from which all things proceed and into which all things return.” Buddhism, too, celebrates the feminine principle by way of the Bodhisattva Guan Yin, whose name means “the one who hears and sees the cries of the world.” With beauty, grace, and boundless compassion for the suffering of humanity, it has been said that Yin’s “greatest significance is as the outpourings or embodiment of the divine feminine.”^[23]

As the major world religions evolved over thousands of years, however, the supreme female deity increasingly faded from view. While, around 27 BC, the first emperor of Rome gave the goddess Cybele the title of Supreme Mother of Rome, by 500 AD, attitudes toward female Gods couldn’t have been more different. The last Goddess temples in Rome and Byzantium were closed by the Christian emperors, and the so-called polytheistic “pagan” religions were driven out of worship, taking the female deities with them.

Conclusion

Today, instead of a history of the ancient female religions that were celebrated for thousands of years, we are most familiar with the creation story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden courtesy of Eve, making her, you know, responsible for the downfall of mankind from Paradise. As for the supreme female deity? “The Old Testament does not even have a word for ‘Goddess,’” writes Merlin Stone. “In the Bible, the Goddess is referred to as Elohim, in the masculine gender, to be translated as God. But the Koran of the Mohammedans was quite clear. In it we read: ‘Allah will not tolerate idolatry...the pagans pray to females.’”^[24] Some might say the disappearance of the Goddess occurred naturally with the march of modern civilization. But, as many historians and theologians have pointed out, it’s likely no coincidence that the patriarchal cultures that conquered earlier indigenous populations are fundamentally intertwined with the downfall of the Goddess, and the reframing of this revered form of worship as cultic, lewd, and primitive.

Our video decoded and literature review reveals that Ariana Grande's 'God Is Woman' is not only a song, it's also very subtly a reminder that there lies before us a rich history of Goddess worship altogether separate from the patriarchal religions, customs, and laws most of us were raised on. Archaeological evidence suggests that God was considered female for the first 200,000 years of human life on earth, even if male-dominated religions sought to displace the matriarchal order.^[25] Ultimately, by making ourselves independent of male culture, we can better understand our heritage, and, as Merlin Stone writes, cultivate "a contemporary consciousness of the once-widespread veneration of the female deity as the Wise Creatress of the Universe and all life and civilization."

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