Male Hysteria, Female Asceticism - On Paradigm Revisions of Sex Roles

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The paradigm is understood to be a thought pattern or perspective by means of which reality is examined and analyzed. As a result, paradigms often lead to a transformation of reality. Paradigms can in this respect be compared to myths or even religions, which - as we are well aware from the three monotheistic religions - also change the world. Paradigms, however, in contrast to religions, lay claim to being scientific, i.e., objectively verifiable reflections of reality. The paradigm revisions to be discussed here have to do with sex roles and have been evolving since the Age of Enlightenment. Of course, the Enlightenment brought about other paradigm revisions as well, but - as I hope the following study will show - the other paradigm revisions are more or less closely related to the ones concerning sex roles.[1]

Paradigm Revisions in Literature

There are two major myths of sex roles that change fundamentally during the Enlightenment: the one is the myth of Don Juan, the other the myth of the witch, or her successor, Carmen. I will try to give a brief description of this change. Beginning with the latter: Carmen is an invention of the Enlightenment, a creature of the romantic prophet of reason, Prosper M,rim,e: an invention that has been revised, embellished, intensified infinitely often - until the heroine of the 19th century novella achieves the stature of a figure in classical Greek tragedy in the 20th century.

The most surprising aspect of the Carmen figure is the change in the evaluation of the witch myth, of which she is unmistakably a manifestation - the word "Carmen" derives from the word for a magic spell. What is surprising is the new, positive evaluation of an untamed woman, who evokes and surrenders to her passions, a woman who is "possessed". The witches of previous centuries had been subjected to a different Passion, than the freedom of love M,rim,e and later Bizet associated with their witch.[2]

The change perceptible in the Carmen figure is the result of a revision of the witch paradigm itself: a few decades earlier women had been burned at the stake because of their allegedly uncontrollable sexual urge, but in the mid-19th century a new creature emerges, that is no less possessed by carnal desires, no less sinful and able to lure men to their doom, but is now wrapped in an aura of sanctity. Even more than sanctity: this creature becomes the ideal of femininity, the epitome of genuine emotion, of unbroken, undiluted womanhood, and she assumes a normative quality for any woman desirous of being an "authentic" woman.

This upgrading of the witch in the 19th century also holds true for the real witch - in retrospect, of course. The initiative came from the historian and mythologist Jules Michelet with his book "The Witch", which appeared almost simultaneously with Mérimée's "Carmen". The book attempts a rehabilitation of the witch, but not in the sense of the humanists, who had argued for abolishing torture. Rather, this rehabilitation is no less than the glorification of the old herb women and their powers. Michelet not only characterizes the witch as the doctor of the peasants, he also, along with Mérimée, regards the witch as the source of all desire, of pulsating nature, as the manifestation of "real life".

In essence, the paradigm of the female image is reversed, from that of a witch bringing death and destruction and therefore condemned to death, to that of a witch synonymous with life - a strange aboutface, especially considering the short span of time it occurs in. The speed of this transformation alone offers food for thought, and should prevent women from being overly enthusiastic about the new glorification of female passion.

At the same time Don Juan, that great paradigm of the male lover, also experiences a revision. The myth exists in more than a thousand versions.[3] The first was written in 1630 - more or less as an ideological escort of the conquistadors, who were venturing out to explore and triumph over new dark continents. Don Juan only becomes a ladies' man in the course of the 18th century, reaching a peak of aesthetic sophistication in Mozart's and Da Ponte's "Don Giovanni", but at the same time crossing over into caricature. (The element of caricature is revealed for instance in the depiction of Don Giovanni's pedantically keeping score on his conquests - the great seducer, supposedly dedicated to sensuality, lust and anarchy.)

In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries this aspect of ridiculousness is emphasized more and more. The conqueror assumes an increasingly spiritualized form; he becomes an ascetic, who now pursues the "idea of woman", as Ernst Bloch writes of Lenau's Don Juan.[4] It is no longer the woman's body that he finds interesting, but rather her dis-embodied female essence, if his attention can be diverted from the study of geometry, mathematics or other pleasures of pure abstraction. He disappears completely as a sexual partner, becomes a weakling, a failure in bed. Finally, this ideal of masculinity will be handed over to the psychoanalysts of the 20th century for dissecting before being thrown overboard once and for all. In the course of Don Juan's paradigm changes his masculinity gradually fades away, the erotic seducer is disembodied, and the challenger, once constructed as the polar opposite to Christianity's ascetic masculine ideal, turns spiritual.

*Paradigm Revisions in the Science*s

Now, things would be very simple, if these two paradigm reversals could simply be regarded as documents of the evolution of the sexes or of sex roles. However, there is an additional, major paradigm revision that seems to contradict this first one, while other developments confirm the changes in the Don Juan and Carmen paradigms. In fact, the myth of Carmen is accompanied by a real emergence of women in the course of the 19th century: women take up the pen, their works are published; they gain access to different professions; they organize and gain the right to vote; they gradually achieve economic independence; and, last but not least, they fight for "free love", demanding and winning the right to a sexuality freed from the corset of straight-laced morality.

Similarly, Don Juan's development appears to reflect at least some levels of reality. Above all, the artists and writers of the Romantic and Decadent periods seem to be the incarnation of a has-been - effeminate - Don Juan. With their migraines, their sickliness, their cult of fragility and spirituality, they too look as though they want to get rid of the traditional male image of the conqueror, the hero and strong man.[5]

But there are also developments that say the exact opposite - and these are no less mythic, even if they usually come from the field of science. There are 19th-century theories regarding women that propagate the idea, a "normal" woman has only a reduced or even a non-existent sex drive. In 1886, the German neurologist Krafft-Ebing writes:

> "The male has without a doubt a more vigorous sexual need than the female. Consequent to this powerful natural urge, after a certain age he desires a female (...) The woman is different. If she is mentally normal and well brought up, then her sensual desires are limited. If this were not so, the whole world would be a brothel and marriage and family unthinkable. In any case, the man who flees a woman, and the woman who pursues sexual pleasure are abnormal phenomena."[6]

Frigidity is declared to be the normative aspect of the female constitution, by a number of researchers and biologists, and even by some psychologists.

This theoretical speculation is new, and implies an enormous change in the concept of female normality. Christianity was not alone in ascribing to the female sex an insatiable sexuality, which was used to justify the persecution of women. The "Malleus Maleficarum", a kind of how-to-identify-witches book written for the Inquisition, expressed the following opinion about masculine sexual needs: "Praise be to God on high,

who has protected the male sex from such corruption down to the present day." In pre-Christian times the female sexual impulse was also held to be superior to that of the man. I need only mention Tiresias of classical Greece, who was blinded by Hera for betraying the fact, that woman's sexual pleasure was ten times as great as man's. The concept of a relative inferiority of the female libido occurs only in the industrial nations and for the first time in the Industrial Age.[7]

At the same time, anorexia nervosa also appears in the Occident for the first time in the late nineteenth century. Its symptoms coincide with the Christian ideal of asceticism. The vital difference is: whereas the asceticism of earlier periods was considered to be an ideal that was in contrast to woman's carnal nature and raised to the status of religious sanctity, anorexia (which appears nearly exclusively as a symptom of the female body) is now ascribed to the realm of sickness.

On the other hand, the image of masculinity gains in substance, sensuality, and sexuality. Of course, the proponents of an inferiority of the female sex drive are generally identical with the proponents of the new theories on masculine virility. This school has a predilection for referring to the laws of the animal kingdom, (while for centuries the definition of masculinity had consisted in distinguishing man from the animal, which again served as a definition of femininity). Supporters of this new school, such as Darwin, Möbius or Lombroso, derived their often eccentric theories on masculinity from the behaviour of animals or the anatomy of the sexes.[8] These theories were confirmed in some respects from a psychological standpoint by Freud's theories of female sexuality, which you are probably familiar with.

The contradiction of ideas about "normal" masculinity and femininity reached a peak around 1900, when scientists of sexuality such as Havelock Ellis appeared on the stage of paradigm speculation and created confusion in the academic world by declaring, not only were the theories of the lesser female libido incorrect, but the entire female body was a single erogenous entity. Compared to the "extensive sexual apparatus of the female", the male's was in a relatively stunted state, as Ellis declared. He added that for this very reason the amputation of the clitoris had been given up in various countries: since the entire female body was of an erogenous disposition, amputation had come to be regarded as senseless.[9]

This theory on feminine sexuality, with its many parallels to the Carmen myth, is also mirrored in a new reality: I only want to mention the astonishing speed with which the female body has been undressed since 1900 and its nakedness, the complete exposure of the erogenous entity, has become normal. Only a few decades after Krafft-Ebing's theories of a chaste female normality, handbooks are published by the millions teaching women how to lead an erotic, sensual life, in order to become an authentic woman.

In short, we are confronted by a confusing mass of completely contradictory sex roles - not only on the mythical plane, but also in real life. But I think they only appear to contradict each other, and the paradoxes of these sex roles can be untangled. One key to the problem seems to me the male hysteria that had its coming out in society around 1800, at a time, when all these sexual transformations - I am tempted to say: transsexual transformations - began to take place.

Male hysteria was called hypochondria at first. There was an initial reluctance to refer to symptoms of the male body as hysteria, a word derived from the Greek word for womb, hence, from the female anatomy. This reluctance is soon lost however, and - which is worthy of note - it is not so very much the doctors as the intellectuals, the artists and literary people, who are the first to use the word in reference to men. With hysteria, the creative man lays claim to feminine symptoms, and to femininity itself.

At first glance it is possible to think that male hysteria arises as a substitute for the successfully suppressed female body, which in the meantime has been reduced to ashes at the stake - this body that was persecuted as the incarnation of sensuality, sexuality itself. One might be tempted to think that the male hysteric is trying to save or recreate the body by developing different forms of hypochondria, by the minute observation of all aspects of his physiology. In fact, by taking pleasure in his own sickliness, weakness, fragility, he conjures up and exhibits his own female nature. He is ready to go to the point of

impotence to become a real woman - a woman who corresponds to the concept of an asexual woman, not to the myth of Carmen or the definitions of Havelock Ellis. Falling, fainting becomes a pattern of lust for him: "It is strange and odd how I have loved everything that can be summarized by the word "fall"," writes St,phane Mallarm,.[10] Gustave Flaubert develops the falling sickness, hysterical fits similar to epilepsy. Both repeatedly call themselves - and with apparent enjoyment - hysterics, as do other artists and writers of the 19th century, such as Baudelaire.[11]

But this attitude shift toward femininity cannot be equated with a shift toward women. This is revealed by taking a closer look at a number of phenomena accompanying the male enthusiasm for femininity: above all the fact, that it is almost always accompanied by a turning away from all women - except the mother. And the mother herself often only serves as a protective shield against contact with women. In other words: the male hysteric is not interested in a re-evaluation of women, but in a higher evaluation of male femininity. Or to put it in another way: the falling sickness is nothing but a new phallic obsession, that makes the disembodiment or spiritualization of Don Juan in the early 1800's seem less the disappearing act of a conqueror, than a mere change in the strategy of conquest. So, I would like to take a closer look at the destructive aspects of the male hysteric, hidden behind the facade of his softness, tenderness and even his masochism, his pleasure in self-destruction.

It is not an especially new insight, that the decadent loves violence and destruction. This characteristic is usually explained as the effeminate man's attempt to overcome his weakness by means of an emphasis on strength and violence; it is said that his boastful swaggering serves to compensate his sense of helplessness, that his intentional destructivity is nothing more than a lack of will converted into its opposite.[12]

I would like to put forward the opposing hypothesis, namely that the male hysteric's love of violence and his cultivation of his own fragility serve one and the same purpose: to complete the work of the stake, to abolish women once and for all, to make room for a new and improved womanhood, a womanhood of male origin. It will become clear that the image of the "passive" man is not in such disagreement with the "active" man propounded by Lombroso, Freud and other theoreticians of masculine virility as it would appear. On the other hand, this destructivity, this pleasure in doing violence to others, seems to me to be the main difference between male hysteria and female anorexia, which at first glance have so many similarities, above all, the ideal of a spiritualized body.

This thesis is exemplified by a German writer of the early Romantic period: Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis. Even the pseudonym he gave himself is revealing, it means "someone who clears land and cultivates virgin soil." He chose the name in full awareness of its meaning, which he applied both to his work and his life.

Virgin Soil and the Male Hysteric

It is evident that Novalis considered himself an hysteric, with all the symptoms of effeminacy - of painfully pleasurable effeminacy - that go along with it. Typical is the painstakingly precise observation of all bodily aspects, which he recorded in his diary, and the glorification of illness, which he describes as an expression of increased "sensitivity" and "probably ... the most interesting stimulus and material for our meditations and our actions". A person should try "by means of daily comments to utilize" his illnesses, since they represent "an apprenticeship in the art of living and the education of the emotions". Through them the human being raises himself above the animal and comes closer to God.[13]

Novalis' tendency to seek erotic fulfillment in love of a chaste and spiritual rather than sensual kind also characterizes him as a male hysteric.[14] Novalis made page-long excerpts from medical books on "impotentia virilis"[15] - an interest in masculine "failure" that is one of the features of male hysteria. And yet, Novalis was living at a time when hysteria had not yet become the fashion, as it was in the days of Flaubert, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Oscar Wilde, and even later, the surrealists.[16] In this sense Novalis was cultivating virgin soil - but first he had had to clear it.

Novalis had a practical sense for reality. His biographers are surprised again and again at the strength of will and sense of purpose the poet of the esoteric and the Blue Flower was able to bring to his law studies and his work as a mining inspector in civil service. The records of his contemporaries also show clearly, that Novalis was anything but a dreamer.[17] This is not unusual for a male hysteric. Looking at the workload of Flaubert, Proust or others, there are obviously enormous energies at work, which seem in striking contrast to the alleged weak will and passivity of the male hysteric. I think the appearance of a renunciation of the world is misleading. On the contrary there is a grim tenacity and iron resolve in his endeavours to transform what is unreal into reality - at the cost of the existing reality, which is either renounced or, as in the case of Novalis, is even consigned to destruction. "Nature should be art and art should become a second nature," he writes.[18] Similarly, in "Heinrich von Ofterdingen" he says: "The world becomes a dream, the dream becomes world."[19]

In short: matter is to be transformed into thought, and thought is to assume material form. Mind becomes concrete, sensuality becomes spiritual. Accordingly, the people in his novel are transformed into metaphors - into flowers, stars, the moon, etc. - while the metaphors take on flesh and blood. Observing this interplay of Novalis' it becomes clear, that the embodiment or materialization of the idea he propagates is inseparable from the simultaneous effort to dis-embody everything that is visible, sensual, living[20] - an effort, that is the key to the destructivity of the male hysteric.

For Novalis, the motor of this transformation process is the poet - and here is one of the reasons that hysteria was to enjoy such popularity among artists and writers. Novalis calls the poet the "art-man" and pronounces him the "messiah of nature."[21] In fact, a new concept of the role of the artist is born in this period. "The true poet, however, is always a priest, just as the true priest has always been a poet," Novalis says literally.[22] The poet is priest and politician at the same time, responsible for the transcendental sphere as well as for establishing a new "poetic state", in which the prince will be the "artist of artists".[23] In this way mankind would be lead into the "Thousand-Years Empire", he says.[24] The concepts show clearly, that a secularization of Christian metaphors is taking place here - a process, that was to be of decisive importance both for German history of the 19th and 20th centuries, and for the role assigned to women by Novalis and others - a role, in which female self sacrifice is equalled with that of the redeemer.

Novalis was an avid reader of Fichte, whom he met several times. His notes on Fichte's work alone comprise 500 pages.[25] He took over Fichte's idea of the "I", (the "ego" in psychological terms), that creates itself in a parthenogenetic act, by postulating its opposite as a willfully assessed "Not-I". Novalis applied this construction to poetry, which he praised as the "hero of philosophy."[26] "The division between poet and thinker is only an illusion and a disadvantage to both," he writes.[27] For Novalis - and it is necessary to add: in Novalis - the poet becomes the manifestation of Fichte's ego phantasies: "The poetic philosopher," writes Novalis, "is en ,tat de Cr,ateur absolu."[28] Novalis, however, turns Fichte's Not-I (the object which the I derives its existential justification from) into a "You".[29] And this You becomes, in contrast to Fichte, who sees it as a polar opposite to the I, a part of the I.[30] In this way the poet, who has become virtually hermaphroditic, is made capable of "giving birth to the world from within."[31]

Fichte's "will", however, the energy which makes the construction of a Not-I possible, is turned into "love" by Novalis.[32] In the concepts of You and love it is clear that the pattern is beginning to become an analogy of the relationship between the sexes. Hegel will make this process more abstract by speaking of thesis and antithesis, which join to make a synthesis.[33] But his thesis and antithesis obey the same laws as Fichte's I and Not-I. How synthetic - in every sense of the word - this I is, which is the product of the love dialectics of Novalis, remains to be shown.

For Novalis, the dialectics of love are by no means limited to his poetic or philosophical works. He projects it into material life as well,[34] and here the destructivity of the male hysteric becomes most apparent. He attempts to create the female essence or the ‘You’ out of himself, while transforming the actual woman into an "idea".

At the age of 22 Friedrich von Hardenberg meets Sophie von Kühn, who is soon to become his fiancee. He falls in love with her at first sight. "A quarter of an hour determined my life," he writes to his brother.[35] Sophie von Kühn is twelve and a half at the time - a child, even for those days. According to the few portraits that we have, she is pretty but no more than that, graceful, cheerful - but not an unusual girl in the opinion of those who knew her. Only Novalis' friend Ludwig Tieck, who never saw Sophie, describes her in ecstatically idealistic terms.[36] Her intellectual qualities are rather limited, as her own letters and diary entries make evident. Sophie von Kühn is - as a real person - not an outstanding personality, which makes her all the more satisfactory as an object for the projection of images of femininity, for the ideals of the You, that "is born from within," namely as a part of the I. Novalis does not try to hide the fact that in Sophie he is looking for an ideal of his own, and that his love for her has very little to do with the supposedly beloved person: "I feel religion for Sophie, not love. Absolute love, independent of the heart, founded on faith, is religion."[37] One of his biographers expresses the character of this bridal relationship in words that require no additional explanation:

"Is it love at all for Novalis, in the usual sense? Sophie had a decisive influence on him. He felt she was his sister from an eternal home, and these are the ties he wants to keep to her. Is his idea that this relationship has to be a bridal one perhaps a mistake? Is there no alternative to the usual bridal relationship leading to marriage, some other relationship, in which the aspiring young man is supported by the other being as a protective spirit and ideal? As for Dante, so for Novalis?"[38]

Dante's Beatrice was dead; Sophie for her part is soon to die: of her metamorphosis into a metaphor, a process she has no possibility of defending herself against - her self-confidence, and her mental abilities would have had to be developed in an entirely different way, than her age and her deficient schooling permitted. But she says, and Novalis himself notes: she feels "a horror of marriage ... She does not want my love to inhibit her ... My love is often a burden to her."[39] In contrast to Sophie's need to maintain a distance to him,[40] his love has a cannibalistic element. He wants to absorb her completely.[41] He writes to his friend Schlegel:

> "My favorite field of study has basically the same name as my bride-to-be. Sophie is her name - Filosofie is the soul of my life and the key to my innermost self ... To write something and to marry is nearly one and the same goal of my desires."[42]

Even during her lifetime Sophie begins to assume the character of a muse - and it is just this process of disembodiment that she is destroyed by.[43] Half a year after announcing her engagement with Friedrich von Hardenberg she falls ill. A long ordeal begins that will end with her death at the age of fifteen. She dies on March 18th. In a fictitious wedding announcement he had made for fun some time before, Novalis chose this very date for his wedding with Sophie. One has the impression that she dies dutifully, a sacrificial death in a manner of speaking, which represents the consummation of this marriage.

This impression is intensified by the events after her death. Novalis abandons himself to sorrow, but his sorrow does not prevent him from minutely observing and describing his feelings in a diary. Many of his biographers have written that Sophie's death was the hour of Novalis' birth as a Romantic poet.[44] This is not the biographers' invention. Novalis himself confirms it in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, scarcely a month after Sophie's death:

> "The autumn of my life has come and I feel so free, usually so strong - I will be able to get somewhere after all. I can give you my solemn oath - that it is already very clear to me what a heavenly coincidence her death was - a key to everything - a wonderfully fitting step. This is the only way of solving some things, revealing some immaturities. A simple, powerful strength has awakened within me. My love has become a flame that consumes all earthly things."[45]

And Schlegel answers no less clearly: "You would not believe how entirely I am by your side, and how completely I am able to feel for your situation. But I assure you, that I could often find it enviable to have experienced such a loss."[46] That sorrow is not the only subject of this experience is apparent from the comment that Novalis noted weeks before Sophie's death: "My imagination is growing as my hopes sink."[47] Above all, it is evident in his work, in which the motif of the young woman crops up again and again, who loses her life so that the hero can become a poet or find salvation in some other way.[48]

Novalis is well aware of the sacrifice the young woman makes for him: a sacrifice that consists of giving up her spirit so that he can take her inside as metaphor, as his own female essence - I would like to say, in order to ingest her. One of the last entries in his diary before putting it aside for work of higher value for his immortality, reports a vision he had at the grave of his bride, in which Sophie appears to him with Christ or even as Christ - it is hard to tell. "The earthly image had dimmed and been transformed into a mythical figure in almost blasphemic generosity," as the Novalis researcher Gerhard Schulz puts it.[49] In the "Hymns to the Night," in the novel "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," Sophie appears again and again: as patron saint, or as philosophy. Untouched, chaste Sophie, whose childlike nature prohibited an erotic contact during her lifetime - and I am of the opinion, her sexlessness is the very reason that Hardenberg chose her as the projecting screen for his love, that is, for his self-love - chaste Sophie is not permitted to kiss until after her death, as a muse.[50]

Bloody Weddings

In the transformation from a living woman into a metaphor of male womanhood lies the key to understanding this strange wedding of the concepts of love and death, eroticism and violence that occurs in the course of the 19th century. It is an amalgamation having nothing to do with the traditional association of Eros and Thanatos, with the experience of Otherness which sexuality represents as an anticipation of the unknown and darkness, of death. The "Hymns to the Night," composed by Novalis after the death of Sophie, are full of intoxication, ecstasy, voluptuousness; the absence of light - non-light, as Schulz so aptly puts it [51] - is celebrated, and in this non-light the dead beloved takes on the role of a sun in the night.[52] The Romantics are said to be on a "journey inward"; they penetrate the dark realms of the unconscious. But it is strange, that this journey into the non-light takes places at precisely the same point in history that Galvani discovers electricity. Comparable to philosophy's inventing the ego at just the historical moment in which the Age of the Masses begins and the individual ceases to have its own, individual history - Novalis discovers the fascinations of night, just before light bulbs turn darkness into day.

Should we really believe, that the Romantics who are generally thought of as the non-conformists of positivism and the Enlightenment, as enemies of progress, should we really believe, that they exposed themselves to the unknown? Was it not rather the occupation or colonization of this Otherness? "Where are we going?" asks the hero in "Heinrich von Ofterdingen." "We are always going home," is the answer.[53] The encounter of the Romantics with the dark continent is not an encounter with the unknown, not a surrender to the fearful power of Eros, nor is it a renunciation of the beginning industrial age - rather, it is the fabrication of Eros, of an ego that produces its own ecstasy, its own brand of "vitality".[54] As Novalis himself says, the point is "the art, to transform everything into Sophie - or vice versa"[55] - and it is "art", that causes the violence in this process. We will be confronted with this violence - as the violence of an artifically produced eroticism - in the war diaries of Ernst J□nger, as in the work of Richard Wagner and, inseparably, in his anti-Semitism and his ideology of destruction.[56]

Let us return to Don Juan and Carmen. The connection between the old conqueror and the new male hysteric has hopefully been made apparent by the above discussion: namely, that Don Juan became an esoteric, because he did not want merely to conquer woman, but to create her from within. But what connects Carmen with this ethereal representation of femininity in a dead Sophie or Beatrice? What does she have in common with the Muse?

Male Femininity

One of the main topics of the Romantic period is the theme of the Doppelgänger, the shadow, the mirrored reflection, in short, of the other self the hero is searching for. In many cases this alter-ego appears in female form: as the sister the hero falls in love with and often marries. This love almost always ends in death, as the final fulfilment beyond earthly existence. The emergence and the increase in significance of this literary motif are accompanied on the level of actual life and the relationship between the sexes by the growing symbiosis between men and women, their merging in houses, family groups and marriages that become continually closer, and in which the ideal of love marriages is later joined by the ideal of complete sexual harmony.[57] In this symbiotic love ideal, the borderlines between the I and the You fade or even disappear. Here on the level of empirical psychological reality, an absorption of the Other takes place that is similar to the example of Novalis and his bride.[58] The ideal of the love between brother and sister emerges, whose incestuous components seem to exclude sexuality and from which theories such as those of Krafft-Ebing on the deficient female libido will be derived. This desexualized image of women confronts another concept of femininity that gains increasing importance in the course of the 19th century: the image of the "cruel woman" and the powerful female seducer. And with that we come back to Carmen. She - as do all other female seducers and witches of modern times - represents the re-embodiment of woman-as-metaphor. In Carmen's passionate body, outfitted with all the instincts and the ecstasies of the authentic woman and the erstwhile witches, the female image that had been ingested by the male hysteric assumes visible, living shape once again, a shape that makes the blood run faster and, which is only logical, who also bathes in blood. The pictures of Salome with the bleeding head of John the prophet, the pools of blood surrounding a stabbed Carmen, the knife in Lulu's seductive body, the torn flesh of the warrior who drives Flaubert's Salammbô into a faint, all these pictures reveal an astonishing similarity to the voluptuous, bloody experiences in Ernst Jünger's war diaries. The close association of these female figures to destruction, the blood, that they demand or that flows from their wounds, serves as visible evidence for the vitality, authenticity of these "cruel women" and their erotic nature. This blood is, however, also the inheritance of the process of destruction, that all the Sophies have suffered and out of which the Carmens have grown.

That these cruel women are phantasies of male femininity, can be documented by many examples: "Woman as sphinx!" Otto Weininger protests, "Greater nonsense has scarcely ever been uttered, a greater cheat never been staged. Man is infinitely more full of mystery, incomparably more complicated."[59] That in reality a man is hidden behind the feminine mystery figures, is also shown by Novalis: when the hero finally raises the veil of the goddess of Sais, he discovers - himself.[60]

The forms assumed by male femininity in the 19th and early 20th centuries are countless; it receives its most superlative manifestations as femme fatale in Salome, Medusa or Lulu. But the rapid career of a madonna-like woman's portrait such as that of the Mona Lisa in the 19th century[61] also belongs here. Her supposed air of mystery, the ambiguity of her gaze, the androgynous quality many have seen in her smile, even prior to Duchamps[62] - all this makes her the ideal representation of male femininity. This perspective is supported by the fact that, when comparing the data of a self-portrait of Leonardo's with the Mona Lisa, the American computer artist Lillian Bell discovered a complete agreement in numerous details of the two faces.[63] The success of this painting that was raised to the generic status of the work of art par excellence, stems in my opinion from its being a man's first successful attempt at objectifying himself as a woman: not as a transvestite, not as a transsexual, but as a man who makes his femininity visible on canvas - a femininity, it goes without saying, that is much more authentic than that of any real women: because it is the result of a work of art, created "from within".

The Femininity of Women

But where is the real woman in relation to this powerful image of the female - especially the so-called "strong woman", who resists being absorbed into literature, marriage or the other institutions of sexual harmony? I want to attempt to answer this question as briefly as possible. She can be found in the anorexic woman, withdrawing from the ingestion of her femininity by reducing her body. She starves the body that the overwhelming, voracious ego is trying to utilize as a You, a Not-I or antithesis. The anorexic refuses to surrender her body as the embodiment of a metaphor, as incarnation of male femininity. This means that

anorexia, which seems to support the concept that feminine sexlessness is normal, is in reality the expression of the exact opposite - namely of an attempt at feminine self-assertion: anorexia symbolizes the struggle of an I that resists its own transformation into a Not-I or a You in Novalis' sense. An antithesis that prevents the thesis from extending itself by the comfortable means of dialectics.[64]

The so-called strong woman can also be found as a manifestation of the "passionate woman", of Carmen, Lulu and the other "art-women". She is the one marching for women's suffrage, demanding the right to write, to be accepted into art academies, to practice as a doctor and a lawyer. And she will claim the right to free love, and unfettered sexuality. She even appears in the role of the Carmen-like seducer, the tragic lover. To this group belong some of the most courageous and most admirable women of the last 200 years, women I also admire greatly. The names of these advocates of women's rights, women writers, women artists do not have to be listed here. But as an illustration of a woman who took on this role of tragic lover, I would like to mention Franziska von Reventlow, a truly emancipated woman, especially in matters of sexual morality. In a diary entry from 1905 she writes: "Cruel énigme - the sign that determines my whole life ... If I want to hold onto the one thing, a thousand others come over me in a rush... When I am in love, it is always a misfortune for both of us, always, always, inevitably."[65] The price the anorexic pays for her form of rejection is obvious. The price the woman pays who turns herself into a femme fatale, is perhaps even higher: she relinquishes the possibility of being the subject of her own femininity, and becomes the incarnation of an image of femininity she did not invent and that competes with her very existence.

By and large it is possible to say that the mystery of the contradictory sex roles can be solved by understanding that different sexual beings - one real and one imaginary, but no less material - are competing with each other, and that in this conflict - as contradictory as it may seem - the anorexic is fighting for her sexual identity, while Carmen must be regarded as one of the figures that contribute to the downfall of Eros. Because it is in Carmen that male femininity finds its expression: a femininity, that eliminates all other forms of Otherness. I think, that the self-doubts many women are exposed to today, in an age that seems to be willing to accord a more important place to women, have their origins in this conflict: the difficulty to differentiate between their self-image and the projection of male femininity that attempts to manifest itself in the female body. Can I trust my instincts, my emotions, my body, is the question behind these self-doubts, or am I only the incarnation of male images, which by their very existence deny my identity, my Otherness?

For the man this conflict between imagination and reality has had other consequences that become especially apparent in many artists. It seems increasingly difficult for a man to be an artist and at the same time love a woman: the embodiment of his own femininity, of his feminine essence in a self-created Other, stands in the way of any real confrontation with Otherness, with the unknown.[66]

All this means of course, that the search for a specifically feminine sexuality or aesthetic, as brought to debate again and again, is actually senseless. More than that: any such definition is very likely to be turned into the confirmation of male femininity - the borderlines between the material woman and the image of woman created by man have become too indistinct. One minor but revealing example is the fact that in Britain recently a young man who had not been recognized as such by the jury was the winner of a beauty contest.[67]

My reservations concerning the search for a specifically feminine sexuality or aesthetic and my especial distrust of all attempts at a rehabilitation, reinstallation or even exact definition of female identity do not mean that I question the validity of women's studies. On the contrary: I owe this field a great deal for an infinite number of insights and for uncovering many hidden sources. But it is not the female identity this research has uncovered for me. It is something else, which I would describe as the gendered nature of history, and by which I mean both the interrelation of the sexes and the influence gender has had on history. I think that women's studies have been and will be revealing in areas that leave us sometimes speechless, such as German Anti-semitism, such as the Nazi death camps or the laboratories of genetic technology, such as the functioning of the modern "mother state", with its total control and authoritarian

welfare institutions or modern forms of resistance such as the hunger strike. I mean especially the kind of women's studies that takes a close look at the myths hidden behind visible reality. Women have experienced these myths in their bodies down through the centuries and they are still experiencing them - and this means they know what they are talking about.

All quotations, as well as Ms. Braun's text, translated from the German by Melanie Flemming.

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[1] Of course, the paradigm shifts analyzed here are already visible at an earlier date, but they become especially apparent during the Enlightenment.

[2] "Love is like a gypsy's nature," it says in Bizet's "Carmen", or: "Love is a wild bird..."

[3] Brigitte Wittmann, ed. Don Juan, Darmstadt 1976.

[4] Ernst Bloch, Don Giovanni, alle Frauen und die Hochzeit, in: Das Prinzip Hoffnung, Gesamtausgabe, vol. V, Frankfurt 1959, p. 1187.

[5] The close relationship of a number of contemporary models for the "new man," in which primarily the demand for a recognition of femininity in men is held in common, with the Décadence and Romanticism should not be overlooked. It is one of the reasons a comprehensive examination of male hysteria seems especially relevant today.

[6] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathis sexualis I, 1886 (reprint), Munich 1984, p. 12 cont.

[7] See Havelock Ellis, The Sexual Impulse in Women, in: Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol. I, part 2, Kingsport, Tenn. 1942.

[8] See Charles Darwin, Die geschlechtliche Zuchtwahl, trans. by Heinrich Schmidt, Leipzig 1909, p. 250; P. Möbius, Die Geschlechter der Tiere, vol. 2, Halle, p. 4; also Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes, Halle 1902, p. 14 cont.; C. Lombroso and G. Ferrero, Das Weib als Verbrecherin und Prostituierte, Anthropologische Studien, gegr□ndet auf eine Darstellung der Biologie und Psychologie des normalen Weibes, trans. by H. Kurella, Hamburg 1894, p. 129 cont. and p. 172. The two last works explain feminine prostitution in terms of women's deficient libido. In other publications feminine prostitution is found to be rooted in the insatiability of women's sexual desires.

[9] M. Hartung, Homosexualität und Frauenemanzipation, Leipzig 1910, p. 28; Havelock Ellis, The Mechanism of Detumescence, in: Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol. II, part 1, Kingsport, Tenn. 1942, p. 132.

[10] St,phane Mallarm,, Plainte d'automne, 1867, in: Oeuvres complŠtes, Paris 1945, p. 270.

[11] Flaubert refers to himself as a "fat hysterical girl" or as an "old hysterical woman," quoted from Jean Paul Sartre, Der Idiot der Familie, Gustave Flaubert, 1821-1857, vol. IV, German by Traugott König, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1977, p. 230; see also the letter to George Sand from Jan. 12/13, 1867, in: Gustave Flaubert - George Sand, Correspondances, Paris 1981; Baudelaire writes: "Hysteria: Why should this physiological mystery not be the basis and the bedrock of a literary work." Charles Baudelaire, Madame Bovary, in: L'art romantique, Oeuvres, Texte établi et annoté par Y.-G. Le Dantec, vol. 2, Paris 1932, p. 447. Similarly, Joris-Karl Huysmans ascribes "learned hysterics" to Jean Des Esseintes, the hero of his novel. Joris-Karl Huysmans, Gegen den Strich, trans. by Hans Jacob, Zurich 1965, p. 126; The list of these adepts of hysteria could be continued endlessly. Among them are - which is not of just marginal significance - some of the most important artists of the 19th and 20th centuries, who gave literature, painting and music decisive new impulses.

[12] See the paragraph "Die Affinität der Décadence zur Gewalt" in: Wolfdietrich Rasch, Die literarische Décadence um 1900, Munich 1986, p. 87 cont.

[13] Novalis, Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs, ed. by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 2nd corrected, revised and supplemented edition, vol. II, Stuttgart 1960 (referred to in the following as : HKA), p. 667, 686, 662 cont.

[14] In a letter to his brother Erasmus, Novalis writes about his relationship to women: " It is all over with the tender flower of my affection, as soon as I receive coarse signs of favor." Novalis, Schriften, ed. by Paul Kluckhohn tog. with Richard Samuel, 4 vols., Leipzig 1929 (referred to in the following as: Kl), vol. IV, p. 81 cont.

[15] HKA III, p. 613 cont.

[16] The surrealists called hysteria "the greatest poetic discovery of the end of the 19th century," Louis Aragon, André Breton, Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie, in: Révolution surréaliste, Nr. 11, 3.15.1928; see also note 11.

[17] see the report of the civil official August Coelestin Just on Friedrich von Hardenberg, in: HKA IV, p. 536 cont.

[18] Novalis, Werke, ed. by Gerhard Schulz, Munich 1969 (referred to in the following: Werke), p. 412 cont.

[19] Novalis, Heinrich Ofterdingen, revised text with an afterword by Wolfgang Frühwald, Stuttgart 1984, p. 159.

[20] Frühwald writes about the novel Ofterdingen: "Through the identification of the novel's characters with those of the fairy tale, Novalis wanted to make tangible the transition from the "real world into the hidden one," to establish the dream world as poetic reality. ... Thus, the style of "Ofterdingen" is formed by the power of paradoxes that have

taken shape and reflect upon each other, whereby in a manner of speaking image and reflection come toward each other and melt into one.." Afterword on "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," p. 244 cont.

[21] HKA III, p. 248.

[22] HKA II, p. 441.

[23] HKA II, p. 497.

[24] HKA ii,p. 281.

[25] quoted from Gerhard Schulz, Novalis, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1969, p. 54.

[26] HKA II, p. 291.

[27] ibid.

[28] Kl. III, p. 145.

[29] Kl. III, p. 157.

[30] "Now we see the true bonds of association between subject and object - we see, that there is also an outer world in us, that stands in an analogous relationship with our inner one, as does the outer world outside us with our outer world, and the former and the latter are connected in the same way, as our inner and outer worlds." ibid.

[31] Kl. IV, p. 330 cont.

[32] see Hugo Kuhn, Poetische Synthesis, in: Novalis, ed. by Gerhard Schulz, Darmstadt 1970, p. 217.

[33] In Hegel's dialectic model the antithesis can also not be thought of as an autonomous phenomenon. Without the thesis it is empty of meaning. It is the self-positing Not-I, whose "annihilation", as Hegel calls it, supplements the thesis.

[34] This vivid interest in reality (of an individual or collective kind) may seem surprising in a poet who has apparently dedicated himself to esoterics. In fact, reality is of tremendous importance to him - the one that he would like to see destroyed, as well as the one he wants to fabricate. This interest in reality also explains the fact, that so many of this artistic type feel a calling as "priest" or politican, if not as founder of a religion, and this missionary zeal yields their artistic justification. (This is particularly obvious with Richard Wagner.) Hence, the separation of art and biography so often called for nowadays is completely unfounded, in that it ignores the artists' intentions.

[35] Kl. IV, p. 81 cont.

[36] HKA IV, p. 553.

[37] Fragmenten Blatt II, p. 395, quoted from Heinz Ritter-Schaumburg, Novalis und seine erste Braut, Sie war die Seele meines Lebens, Stuttgart 1986, p. 231. This ideal of love is also expressed in Novalis' work: Heinrich von Ofterdingen says to his bride Mathilde: "What makes me so inseparable from you, what has awakened an eternal longing in me, is not something from our time. If you could only see how you seem to me, what a wonderful picture your image permeates and radiates toward me, you would not be afraid of aging. Your earthly image is only a shadow of this picture." Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, p. 121. Gerhard Schulz writes: "Love and loving union were, as Novalis himself experienced it, in reality only a higher or the highest level of self-knowledge and self-fulfillment." G. Schulz, Novalis, p. 98.

[38] Ritter-Schaumburg, p. 50f.

[39] Kl. IV, p. 375.

[40] Sophie retains the formal address of "Sie", which even Novalis finds worth mentioning (ibid.) and was not customary at the time.

[41] see Heinz Ritter-Schaumburg, Novalis und seine erste Braut, p. 155.

[42] Letter from 7.8.1796, HKa IV, p. 186.

[43] "It was a mistake for Novalis to want to tie this "ideal" to himself, to make it his bride. She drew back from this incongruity by means of her death." Ritter-Schaumburg, who quotes Novalis' statement, he "felt religion to Sophie, not love," also interprets Novalis' own statements about Sophie in the sense of sacrificial death, as in the following sentence, which also is taken from the fragment quoted above (comp. note nr. 40): "An exceptional thing moves the world on, but it must also leave early." See Ritter-Schaumburg, Novalis und seine erste Braut, p. 231.

[44] comp. Schulz, Novalis, p 63.

[45] Letter from 4.13.1797, HKA IV, p. 220.

[46] Letter from 5.5.1797, HKA IV, p. 226.

[47] Kl. IV, p. 175.

[48] Above all, Mathilde has to die, before Heinrich can become a real poet, and she does so happily, the wish to die is the highest expression of her love. She says to him: "I do not know what love is, but I can tell you, that I feel as if I were just beginning to live, and that I care so much for you, that I would like to die for you this very moment." Heinrich von Ofterdingen, p. 120. At another place in the novel fragments it says: "Mysticism of history. The shepherdess, or Cyane sacrifices herself for him." (p. 193) It must be acknowledged, that in Goethe's "Werther", which is no less saturated with a longing for death, at least it is the hero who gives up his life, while in the works of

Novalis, of all of the Romantics, and in Wagner's operas it is always the woman who has to die, so that love or other forms of salvation can be fulfilled.

[49] Gerhard Schulz, Novalis, p. 69.

[50] Novalis is engaged for a second time to Julie von Charpentier. It is not until she is seriously ill, as he writes, that "the thought of dedicating my life to her vividly occurred to me" (Kl IV, p. 320 cont.). Julie survives him however.

[51] Gerhard Schulz, Novalis, p. 133.

[52] see Max Kommerell, in: Novalis, ed. by Gerhard Schulz, Darmstadt 1970, p. 181.

[53] Heinrich von Ofterdingen, p. 166.

[54] Frühwald writes about Ofterdingen: "The gaze inward, however, the isolating contemplation of the self has reversed itself into an effective gaze outward. In this way, the meeting with the book from the Provence, which is dark and inexplicable for Heinrich, leads over into an active staging of his own history, during the festivities at the imperial court in Mainz." Wolfgang Frühwald, afterword to "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," p. 242.

[55] Kl. 3, p. 139.

[56] On the close connection between Ernst Jünger and the Décadence, see Karl Heinz Bohrer, Die Ästhetik des Schreckens, Munich, 1978. But the connection to the Romantic period also becomes obvious when reading the following passage from "Heinrich von Ofterdingen", for example: "War in itself," says Heinrich, "seems to me to be a poetic effect. People believe they have to fight for some pathetic possession and do not notice that the Romantic spirit is stimulating them to destroy useless vices. They carry weapons in the cause of poetry, and both armies follow an invisible flag." "In war," Klingsohr answers, "the primeval waters begin to move. New parts of the world arise, new generations rise up out of the great disintegration. The true war is a war of religion; it marches directly into its doom, and the insanity of the people is revealed in its entirety. Many wars, especially the ones arising from national hatred, belong to this class, and they are genuine works of poetry. This is where the true heroes are at home, who are the most noble counterparts of the poets, nothing other than world powers involuntarily permeated by poetry." p. 116 cont; see also p. 191 cont.

[57] This merging of the sexes is most tangible in the dance. At the end of the 18th century the waltz arises, which was a radical innovation. Gerhard Schulz on a small poem dedicated to the waltz by Novalis (HKA I, p. 385): "The invitation to press the girls closer to the beating heart had revolutionary undertones. Because the waltz, which was just coming into fashion at the time, was no longer a social dance of courtly character, but rather two dancers created a small world for themselves, pressed against each other and united in a whirl." (Gerhard Schulz, Novalis, p. 42)

[58] That this cannibalism is not at all limited to the psychological level, and also takes place on a physical plane, can only be implied here: It seems, that in the course of the last two hundred years violence was concentrated increasingly in the so-called "intimate" sphere, and occurred increasingly between family members, sexual partners. Symbiosis is especially clear - the negation of the I-borderlines within the family - where one family member connects a suicide with the murder of the others.

[59] Otto Weininger, Geschlecht und Charakter, Vienna, Leipzig 1917, p.277.

[60] HKA II, p. 584.

[61] Ursula Renner-Henke, Mona Lisa, Zum Frauenphantom des Mannes um 1900. Lecture held in Osnabrück during the symposium "Thema Frau um 1900: Bild, Paradigma, Realität," 11.21.1986.

[62] On the phantasies hidden in the androgynity of images of women, see the chapter "Madonna und Maschine" in: Christina von Braun, Nicht ich, p. 234 cont.

[63] Lillian Bell's study took place at the Bell-Institut for Computer Research. See "Arts and Antiques," Jan. 1987.

[64] I have gone into more detail on the significance of anorexia, which can only be briefly mentioned here, in the chapter "Der Mensch ist, wenn er nicht isst," Nicht ich, p. 458 cont.

[65] Franziska Gräfin von Reventlow, Gesammelte Werke, Munich 1925, p. 369.

[66] Peter Handke is an especially good example for a male artist's fear of coming too close to a woman. See Christina von Braun, Nicht ich, p. 401 cont.

[67] The winner was called Nicholas Barret and the beauty contest took place in May 1986 in Selsey, England.