The Art of Evolution
Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture

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CHAPTER 7

Darwin's Sexual Selection and the Jealous Male in Fin-de-Siècle Art

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Jealousy and The Descent of Man

One of the most pervasive images in Symbolist art is that of the femme fatale, a lascivious, looming, beastly woman who is thought to signify by turns the unwelcome empowerment of the turn-of-the-century female who seeks suffrage or a male-dominated career, or the disease-carrying prostitute, all considered as central to socially urgent issues that posed a threat to masculinity. Bram Dijkstra elaborates on the varying types of fatal women to be found in turn-of-the-century art in his wide-ranging Idols of Perversity, focusing in part on the fallout of Darwin's Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex. He contends that the generally accepted Darwinian argument that women were less evolved and intellectual furnished the scientific proof that women could be considered as animal-like and prepared through evolution to be thought of primarily in terms of their biological instinctive nature, thus the fusion of animals or fish and women as hybrids who seek to entrap men or the Judiths holding bloody male heads as virtual castrators found in art of the period. Whether sadistic or merely erotic, they represent women whose overt sexuality is to be contrasted with art that depicts the more appropriate demure mothers and children that bond in natural settings, equally representative of Darwinian ideas. However denigrating images of the femme fatale are to women, they represent a different choice than the less-exploited, masculinized Amazons that also formed the iconography of powerful women at the turn of the century. They are voluptuous objects of display primarily designed to titillate a male audience. These overwhelmingly fleshy women were depicted by modern male artists at a time when artists were considered by the general public and oftentimes by themselves to be weak and degenerate, unlikely to win a prize female against virile rivals in a Darwinian schema of
sexual selection. The *femme fatale* may often represent a different side of dreaded power than that Dijkstra primarily explores: personal, psychological effects of rejection by the most desirable of women at a time when Darwin's interpretation of the rationale behind mate choice was much discussed. This chapter examines how the popularization of the theory of sexual selection informed imagery of jealousy or powerlessness and how certain artists like Munch and Kokoschka personally identified with the suitor who must inevitably lose out to a more dominant male, doomed to be consumed by the emotion of jealousy.³

Sexual selection refers to an individual of one gender making a choice between two or more potential mates of the opposite gender. Darwin brought up sexual selection in his ground-breaking *On the Origin of Species* (1859), but by the time of the publication of *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), he had come to attach tremendous significance to the role played by sexual selection in evolution. He considered it to be responsible for the primary human racial and gender differences, both physical and mental.

The first chapter of *Descent of Man* introduced similarities among all living organisms, arguing for general descent and made the daring connection between apes and humans, noting how they shared many of the same structures, diseases, and even courtship rituals. Chapter 2 was devoted to similarities in mental faculties and emotions between humans and other creatures. Among shared instincts are self-preservation, sexual love, and love of the mother for her offspring.⁴ Much of volume 1 of *Descent of Man* was devoted to explaining how a moral sense in humans evolved from social instincts in other creatures. In volume 2, Darwin built his argument on sexual selection by devoting no less than eleven chapters to reproductive behavior in insects, birds, and mammals before discussing humans. He introduced the unpopular idea that females selected mates almost exclusively and did so largely through appreciation of "beauty."⁵ Thus, for example, the spectacular colors and patterns of certain male birds as opposed to the drab plumage of the females of the species could be explained by female choice in favor of the most magnificent. In many instances, males engaged in combat with one another, which Darwin referred to as "the law of battle" to drive off rivals. Competition among males for reproductive access to females resulted in significant evolutionary developments and accounted for dimorphism of secondary sexual characteristics.

While *Descent of Man* was devoted to establishing continuity between humans and other living creatures, when it came to sexual selection among *Homo sapiens*, Darwin gave males the power of choice. Nevertheless, he maintained that females of all species were generally more passive and coy and males more sexually aggressive. Darwin defended his transition in this way:
“Man is more powerful in body and mind than woman, and in the savage state he keeps her in a far more abject state of bondage than does the male of any other species; therefore it is not surprising that he should have gained the power of selection.”

Healthy, virile men are the evolutionary result of subsequent generations of men fighting men for the pick of women. As Darwin elaborated, “the greater size, strength, courage, and energy of man, in comparison with the same qualities in woman, were acquired during primeval times, and have subsequently been augmented, chiefly through the contests of rival males for females.”

Through the centuries, he had become larger and more muscular, and more courageous, energetic, inventive, and sexually assertive than woman. Although physical combat was no longer common in gaining a woman's attention in the present day, the continued necessity of defending and feeding offspring favored the ongoing development of intelligence. Women had evolved to be more nurturing, reclusive, and altruistic than men. According to Darwin, women’s principal attraction to men lay in cultural standards of beauty (thus, the differing characteristics of the races), “mental charm,” and ornamentation.

In order to strengthen his argument on sexual selection and "beauty," Darwin augmented the role of rivalry in sexual selection beginning with the second edition of 1874. He had compared Homo sapiens to apes and argued that humans were originally monogamous or polygamous, largely due to male jealousy, female fear of reprisal and dependency, and had never engaged in general promiscuity or polyandry as certain contemporary anthropologists argued. Males who were not as strong would tend to lose mates and would be perceived as less desirable. There was little room for explanations of innocent romantic love in Darwin's world, for nature's ultimate game plan was always reproduction. In the second edition, he quoted Schopenhauer, a favorite of the Symbolists; “the final aim of all love intrigues, be they comic or tragic, is really of more importance than all other ends in human life ... it is not the weal or woe of any one individual, but that of the human race to come, which is here at stake.”

Schopenhauer's pessimism regarding human behavior was in alignment with Darwin and is one of the reasons that Symbolists were prepared to accept the scientist's ideas. They embraced Schopenhauer's theory that the "will to live" (not unlike Darwin's "struggle for survival") is motivated by irrational forces at work in nature, including the urge towards sexual reproduction, which masks as romantic love. For Schopenhauer, love affairs could lead to insanity, suicide, or murder.

Darwin's demystification of love in Descent of Man made him one of the founding theorists of sexology, a field of study that also influenced artists' interest in the psychology of sex. Sexual selection was the stimulus for Have-
lock Ellis's *Man and Woman: A Study of Secondary or Tertiary Sexual Characteristics* (1894) and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, volume four (1908) being specifically on sexual selection in humans. Freud's studies of Darwin date to the 1870s and the evolutionist strongly influenced Freud's theories of humans as driven by unconscious forces like passion, pleasure, reproduction, and survival. For this most influential of psychologists of the twentieth century, sexual motivations were central. Called the "Darwin of mental life" by his biographer and pupil Ernest Jones, Freud credited Darwin with dealing a "biological blow" to human narcissism and proving that "man is not a being different from animals or superior to them; he himself is of animal descent." Sexologist Otto Weininger, a strong influence in Viennese circles in which Kokoschka participated, quoted Darwin on men's superior intellectual gifts and discussed women as possessed by their sexuality.

Wife Capture

At a time when mate selection was under the microscope of science, the origins of marriage were being theorized by anthropologists. One of the arenas of investigation that influenced Darwin and was picked up in popular culture involved wife capture. Darwin cited John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man: Mental and Social Conditions of Savages* (1870) and John McLennan's *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (1865). Both posited that wife capture was an important part of the history of civilization, but disagreed about the advance of civilization before this point. Wife capture was an important focus for Darwin since it was through this brutal act that men held women in "an abject state of bondage," which in turn ultimately gave them full advantage in sexual selection. Jealousy was at the root of the crucial stage that eventually would lead to the ritual of marriage.

The prehistoric brute that fought for and dragged off a young woman became a popularized aspect of sexual selection in the late nineteenth century, and accounts were given in many novels of the period and in art such as Paul Jamin's *An Abduction—the Stone Age* (figure 7.1). Because of the blurred lines between anthropoid and man in Darwin's history, the possessor could be ape, Neanderthal, or *Homo sapiens*. Prehistoric romances were popular in the West in the wake of *Descent of Man*. Women are carried off by savage victors in J. H. Knight-Adkin's *The Woman-Stealers* (1905), J. H. Boox's [Rosny the elder] *Vamireh* (1892) and *Nomai, Amours lacustres* (1911), Robert Bennet's *Romance of the Polar Pit* (1901), Jack London's *Before Adam* (1906), and Peter McCord's *Wolf: Memories of a Cave Dweller* (1908), among others. In Élie
Berthe's *Romans Préhistoriques: le monde inconnu* of 1876 (republished as *Paris avant l'histoire* in 1885), the young woman Deer dwells in a cave in what would become Montmartre in the north of Paris during the Old Stone Age; she is admired by the relatively genteel Fair Hair, who carves ivory and bone into animal shapes that demonstrates that "despite the coarseness of the work the maker was an artist of the first rank for the time." However, it is the hairy, Herculean brute Red who carries Deer off after killing her father, keeping her subjugated by clubbing her. Fair Hair's only chance of rescuing Deer is through cunning. He is ultimately successful, but Red is so strong that even an arrow to the throat and heart leave him standing for a time and it remains uncertain that Fair Hair will prevail. When at last Red falls to the ground, the jealousy and rage experienced by Fair Hair now shifts to the ape-like brute who is only able to watch the newly formed couple. Fair Hair has gained advantage through a superior weapon and the ability to plan an attack. These
advances, plus an artistic ability not central to survival, suggest that he has
greater intelligence than Red; he seems able to lead history to a new stage and
will be the one likely to propagate. What has propelled him forward at a cru-
cial moment has been the emotions of jealousy and possessiveness, the results
of which will affect the next generation.

A decade after the first publication of Berther’s novel, another monstrous
kidnapper of a lovely young woman in Paris threatened to carry the day.
Though pierced in the side by an arrow, Emmanuel Frémiet’s popular Gorilla
Carrying Off a Woman bares his fangs at the viewer, a struggling nude held
under one arm (figure 7.2). The positive reception of Frémiet’s Gorilla, which
won a medal of honor at the salon of 1887, demonstrates the widespread ac-
knowledgment of Darwin’s direct connection between humans and apes and
the study of rudimentary states of instinctive sexuality, jealousy, and capture
by the end of the century. A similar sculpture, Gorilla Abducting a Negress,
had been entered into the salon of 1859 by Frémiet with less official and pub-
lic success. Although the artist had identified the 1859 ape as a female through
an inscription on the sculpture’s base, it was generally understood as male.
Hidden behind a curtain in the entrance foyer, it was nevertheless something
of a sensation and the critic Baudelaire wrote of it, “The orang-outang carry-
ing a woman into the woods (a refused work, which naturally I haven’t seen)
is very much the product of a sharp mind. Why not a crocodile, a tiger, or
another beast likely to eat a woman? Why not? Remember, he has no interest
in eating her, but in raping her. For the lone ape, the gigantic ape, at once more
and less than a man, has sometimes shown a human appetite for woman.”

Baudelaire’s commentary demonstrates that sexual connections between
humans and apes were already familiar territory in the year that Darwin pub-
lished his Origin of Species, which only hints at human evolution. Frémiet
noted that the sculpture was created at a time when there was much discus-
sion about the relationship between apes and humans. Its appearance coin-
cided with the establishment of the Société d’Anthropologie in that year by
physical anthropologist and evolutionist Paul Broca, eventual disseminator
of Darwinian ideas. Broca made the study of similarities between human
skeletons and apes central to his work. At Paris’s museum of natural history
a revived interest in early nineteenth-century French evolutionists Étienne
Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck at midcentury was con-
tributing to the embrace of transformism.

Shocking though Gorilla Abducting a Negress may have seemed in 1859,
stories of African women coupling with apes already circulated in the eigh-
teenth century and were referred to by Buffón, who had precociously treated
the chimpanzee as part of a continuity between humans and animals. Carl
Linnaeus illustrated an orangutan carrying off an African woman in his Genuine and Universal System of Natural History (1795). By the late 1840s, the naturalist Richard Owen had begun publishing reports on the gorillas of Gabon who supposedly showed an interest in abducting native women.  

Frémiet's interest in this newly identified species, the largest of the great apes, is not surprising since he was attached to Paris's museum of natural history, eventually becoming Master of Zoological Drawing there in 1875.  

By 1849, the Paris natural history museum received a gorilla skeleton and in 1851 two bodies, a male and an infant, preserved in alcohol. The donor of the skeleton perpetuated stories of gorillas' lust for women. That the similarity and purpose of the emotions of jealousy and possession among apes and humans was commonly understood by the late nineteenth century is further suggested in a published rumor that circulated after the exhibition of the second version of Gorilla. Marek Zgorniak noted that a story was told of a married man who thought he recognized the features of his wife, a one-time fiancée of Frémiet, in the unfortunate woman and something of his own in the gorilla.

While the 1859 sculpture was destroyed in 1861 and existing photos do not clarify the representation of the genitalia, the 1887 piece is decidedly male. In
this version, Frémiet is more daring in the potential for collapsing the categories of human and ape and indeed European and ape. This female is white and a snake slithers up the rock beneath the ape’s feet, undercutting the Judeo-Christian account of origins and the fall from innocence; a related drawing was inscribed “the first Adam.” Frémiet’s gorilla carries a crude chipped tool, an evolutionary hint at the incipient human within simian ancestry.

Contemporary romances were often recast in light of natural history and novelists examined males’ passion, jealousy, and combative tenacity. The flirtation novels of Paul Bourget and Paul Hervieu, Edith Wharton’s The Choice (1916), and William Dean Howells, Their Wedding Journey (1894) are all examples. In Henry James’ The Bostonians (1886), the feminist heroine is carried off by brute force.25

The Symbolists and Sexual Atavism

Modern artists also created images of prehistoric males battling for females as well as of contemporary men and women engaged in similar pursuits. These scenes had a personal side since modern artists were thought of as part of the peripheral degenerate population, whose fantastic way of representing the world was tied to overly stimulated nervous systems and negative heredity.26 The antithesis of the robust, vigorous males that Darwin envisioned as winners in the contest over women, modern artists by default would be the likely loser when it came to the most desirable of women. Inventive artists might be thought of as geniuses, but this term carried negative associations in the late nineteenth century, for artistic genius was thought of as a particular form of degeneration.

Symbolists tended to agree that they were touched by madness and had overly stimulated nervous systems, but this gave them access to unusual insights. These ideas were not new, but recent work in neurology and the influence of Cesare Lombroso’s Man of Genius (1863) popularized the notion of the “mad genius” a fresh. He argued that certain forms of mental illness were a stimulant to genius, but genius led to weakness of sexual and muscular activity and eventually to sterility. His disciple, the physician Max Nordau, took things further in his notorious text Degeneration of 1892. He connected modern art to “visual derangements.” He devoted an entire chapter to Symbolist writers whose work was often close to that of artists. Of the artists he wrote:27

The Symbolists, so far as they are honestly degenerate and imbecile, can think only in a mystical, i.e., in a confused way. The unknown is to them more powerful than the known; the activity of the organic nerves preponder-
ates over that of the cerebral cortex; their emotions overrule their ideas. When persons of this kind have poetic and artistic instincts, they naturally want to give expression to their own mental state.27

The Symbolists Max Klinger, Franz von Stuck, Alfred Kubin, and Arnold Böcklin in Germany all created scenes of competition, struggle, and death informed by Darwinian ideas (see chapter 3 of this anthology). Ernst Haeckel, Karl Vogt, and Wilhelm Bölsche were influential supporters and popularizers of Darwin in Germany. The biologist and evolutionist Haeckel had himself made comparisons between humans and apes in advance of Darwin in his General Morphology (1866), acknowledged in Descent of Man. He invented the name *Pithecanthropus alalus* for a transitional ape-man yet to be discovered and illustrated his theory of the relatedness of tribal populations with close simian kin in his Anthropogenie (1874).28 This idea of racial hierarchy with Blacks at the bottom of the ladder just next to their ape kin was widely accepted (see figure 3.3).

One of the main themes in the work of Franz von Stuck is the battle of the sexes. The artist noted, “In choosing my themes, I set out to treat only the purely human, the eternally valid, such as the relationship between man and woman. ‘He’ and ‘she’ are present in most of my paintings.”29 Like his compatriot Böcklin, von Stuck made use of fighting mythical creatures to suggest primal drives, often contrasting battling male centaurs or fauns with a lone woman who passively awaits the outcome. Like many of the Symbolists, he explored not only the animal side of the jealous male, but separate imagery of femme fatales, especially portrayed as sphinxes.

Max Klinger had read Darwin as early as the 1870s and an early sketchbook of the period is filled with scenes of aggressive sexuality.30 His social concerns, coupled with readings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, gave him a bleak outlook on the human potential to rise above immediate simian ancestry. As an advocate of women’s equality, part of his explorations of sexuality concerned ways in which female oppression could be envisioned. A huge lobster with an enormous pincer that rapes a woman in his Nightmare of 1878 recalls Darwin’s contention that the male lobster’s overly large pincer was the result of sexual selection, but it is also a horrific sexual aggressor, whose size makes attempts at escape impossible. Jealousy used to determine the outcome of sexual pairing without female choice occurs in “Rivals” from *A Life* of 1882, where two men fight over a prostitute, and “In Flagranti” from Dramas, where a husband kills his wife’s lover, among other examples.

Alfred Kubin, inspired by Klinger, pursued graphic work, much of which was based on dark instincts and prehistory. In Lust of 1900, an enormous ape
with an erect penis regards a nude woman who cowers in a corner. In One for All (1900/1901), a mob of apes approach a chained woman. Also drawn to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and emphasizing Schopenhauer’s materialistic “Will” in nature, Kubin’s perspective was even darker than that of Klinger.

Francišek Kupka, best known for his Symbolist works and abstractions in the early twentieth century, worked as an illustrator in turn-of-the-century Paris. Interested in the sciences and mysticism, he thought of the reproductive instinct and selection as part of the vital force of nature. From 1896 to 1900, he created a series of monkeys with human characteristics in crayon, pastel, and watercolor. In Anthropoïdes of 1902, two apes fight perhaps to the death over a passive female who holds a flower (figure 7.3). Women traditionally have been associated with nature, especially flowers, long before Darwin gave a scientific underpinning to the natural female. In this case, the reference may also be to Darwin’s claim that animals share with humans an aesthetic sensibility, sometimes caricatured during this period as monkeys gazing appreciatively at flowers. It may also allude to Darwin’s considerable attention to the development of color and sexual mechanisms in the evolution of flowers.

In 1904, Kupka was commissioned to illustrate his uncle Élisée Reclus’s study of geography and history L’Homme et la Terre (1905–1908). The artist included scenes of apes and anthropoids meant to demonstrate behavioral roots of humankind. In the plate Origines: La Succession des ages est pour nous la grande école, an anthropoid family sits together, the mother nursing an infant. In Progrès: Le Vrai progres est la conquête du Pain et de l’instruction pour tous les hommes, a working man who reaches out to the viewer is juxtaposed next to an ape with a rudimentary tool. His Rapt: Conquête de la femme shows the now-familiar trope of a brute (this time a man) stepping from a simple boat carrying an unconscious nude female in his rugged arms. For the anarchist uncle and nephew, this is a socially critical image of the makings of patriarchy.

Symbolists whose projects included the exploration of atavistic sexual roots of human behavior often identified with the victimized and powerless female or the hopeless condition of a future inextricably bound to a brutal, prerational past. Their position differs from Naturalists like Jamin or Frémiet whose work represents the public side of scientific or anthropological currents. It demonstrates an antithetical stance to social Darwinists who used natural and sexual selection to rationalize and uphold ideologies of progress with an unsympathetic stance towards the “weak” who are best winnowed out. Introspective Symbolists were not necessarily blind participants in anti-feminist fin-de-siècle culture that historians like Dijkstra maintain them to
Jealousy and Loss in the Work of Munch and Kokoschka

Edvard Munch devoted much of his oeuvre to the wounding experience of sexual jealousy and loss. He never married and obsessed over the women who left him. Munch perceived himself as a degenerate, tainted by negative heredity. In his journal he wrote the much-referenced: "Two of mankind's most horrible enemies were granted to me as an inheritance. An inheritance of tuberculosis and mental illness... A mother who died young gave me a weakness for tuberculosis; an overly nervous father, so pietistically religious as to be almost insane, the descendent of an ancient family, gave me the seeds of insanity." When Munch adopted a Symbolist style, he was cast as a degenerate by critics. Andreas Aubert wrote of him in 1890, "Among our painters, Munch is the one whose entire temperament is formed by the neurasthenic. He belongs to the generation of fair, sickly sensitive people that we encounter more and more frequently in the newest art. And not seldom they find a personal satisfaction in calling themselves Decadents, the children of a refined overly civilized age." Munch would be accused of degeneracy by critics and the public thereafter. At the age of forty-three, he committed himself to a sanatorium in Copenhagen for the treatment of nervous exhaustion and alco-
holism; the proprietor Dr. Daniel Jacobson specialized in treating artists. Throughout his life, Munch maintained that his perpetual state of suffering and his nervous disorders were central to his creativity as an artist, not an unusual stance for a Symbolist.

In the 1880s, Munch was a member of the Kristiania Bohème, a group of Naturalist artists and writers that included the painter Christian Krogh. Interested in psychological motivations, Krogh shared with his close friend Klinger an interest in Darwin's work. In 1889, he painted Struggle for Existence, which depicted a mob fighting over a crust of bread, meant as a criticism of those who promoted social Darwinism.

Krogh advocated free love, which the group practiced sometimes as a veritable scientific experiment. He was involved in a love triangle that included Hans Jaeger, the leader of the group, and the young painter Oda Lasson. Krogh ended up as the temporary victor, marrying Oda, and Jaeger published his journal entries as Perverse Love in 1889. Munch noted that the weakness of this practice was jealousy, which he recalled in the print From the Kristiania Bohème II (1895). Reinhold Heller interprets the print with its lovely femme fatale and male members of the bohemian group gathered around a café table as a single male jealous of the ghosts of the lovers of his young wife.

In 1892/93, Munch did a series of studies on the subsequent love triangle of Krogh, Oda, and her young lover Jappe Nilsen. In the painting Melancholy (also known as Jealousy or The Yellow Boat), Nilsen is depicted hand to face in the iconic pose of melancholia. Behind him, the Krohgs are on a dock near a boat, seemingly unconcerned with his brooding thoughts. The primordial sea, birthplace of all life, was a common setting in Munch's depictions of dark human emotion. This painting inspired a series of others that would represent the major effort of his mature period, first known as Studies for a Series on Love and later as the Frieze of Life. His own elusive love interest in Kristiania was the married Milly Thaulow, and it was upon learning of her divorce and remarriage that he executed Melancholy. In 1893, his friend the novelist/medical student Stanislaw Przybyszewski wrote of it: "the painting is nothing more than the visualization of the suffering felt in natural selection [sic]... This is the way that a landscape is pictured in the mind of a male who has lost a female he had chosen to someone else; the wild, prehistoric battle for the female has been transformed into a cultured, triste, cowardly, resigned brooding." In 1904–1908, Munch wrote the play The City of Free Love, a satire of the bohemian involvements that had caused him so much psychological distress.

Munch used an image based on Melancholy to illustrate the book of poems Airune for his friend the Danish poet Emanuel Goldstein in 1892. Similarly,
the poems were based on loss and jealousy. Alruner itself is a reference to al-
rune or a mandrake root used in a love potion. In 1892, Goldstein wrote to
Munch in reference to the woman who had rejected him:

I recently met the heroine of my poems again. Now she is married. I told her
that if I had not already dedicated the collection of poems to you there would
be no reason why it could not be dedicated to her. Just think about the
women we loved, Munch! That is to say those that betrayed us, we owe many
a beautiful impression to them. Just imagine what would have happened had
they not betrayed us."

The last time Munch took up this motif was in 1902, when the artist had a
final break with his last major love Tulla Larsen.

As a young enfant terrible in 1892, Munch exhibited in Berlin where
his controversial Symbolist works gave him immediate notoriety. The exhibi-
tion was closed down in less than a week at the behest of Kaiser Wilhelm on
behalf of a seemingly outraged public. In protest, a group of young artists
formed the Free Association of Berlin Artists, the beginning of the Berlin
Secession. Munch moved to Berlin in 1893 and became involved with a group
of international writers, artists, and scientists who were interested in Symbol-
ism, Nietzsche’s connection between eroticism and death, psychology, evolu-
tion, and sexual selection. Here he met the Swedish novelist Ola Hansson,
who had written Sensitia Amorosa (1887) on the principal importance of
sexual love; the German poet Richard Dehmel, who would make human pas-
sion his major theme as in his scandalous Woman and World (1896); and the
Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland, who based many of his pieces on the
sex drive. Munch became close to the playwright August Strindberg, who fre-
quently explored Darwinian ideas in his plays. Przybyszewski, who specialized
in neurology, was here as well. He wrote the treatise Concerning the Psychology
of the Individual Neuroasthenic in 1892, but like many of the Symbolist generation
connected creativity with pathology; he declared degeneration genius.

Jealousy at a personal level was no less pervasive among this community
than it had been with Krohg’s group. In 1893, Munch courted a young student
named Dagny Juell, desired by many of the men of the Berlin circle. Jealousy
was such that in a few short months this fraternity was torn apart. Although
Juell played one man off against another, Przybyszewski emerged as Munch’s
main rival. In Munch’s Jealousy of 1895, the features of the man in the fore-
ground are those of Przybyszewski, while a couple reenacts the biblical scene
of temptation in the background (Figure 7.4). The fatal woman is posed as Eve
plucking fruit while a dark-haired man is the willing victim. Her red robe is
open and the entire body and clothing form the shape of a vaginal opening.
Przybyszewski’s beard and moustache pictured in *Jealousy* may represent more than a personal choice in appearance. Darwin believed that facial hair on men was an alluring secondary sexual characteristic, a vestige of the primitive past in which men were selected by women for their beauty and ornamentation. In November of 1892, Munch grew a mustache and maintained it the entire time he was in Berlin. Darwin also listed long hair in women as a universal secondary sexual characteristic. Munch’s *femme fatales* often have long hair that can take on a life of its own, sometimes gravitating toward and even encircling men. In *Jealousy*, a few of the woman’s tresses fall over her lover’s arm.

Przybyszewski eventually married Juell and he wrote a trilogy on the cruelty of love entitled *Homo Sapiens*, featuring two jealous males, himself and Munch, published in 1896. In the first part, “Overboard,” Munch is the thinly disguised Makita who arrives in Berlin and presents his beloved fiancée to his best friend Falk, who claims her. Makita is driven to the brink of insanity, bitterly observing, “Woman is a breeding animal, but man loves. Woman never loves, never. It’s enough for her to breed.”40 He pursues the couple, who depart Berlin, and hallucinates, seeing an imagined fight between two bucks:

Two elks were fighting. They struck at each other with their large horns, separated, and made another terrific lunge. Their horns interlocked. In great leaps they tried to disentangle themselves, turning round and round. There was a crunching of horns... And near the fighting animals a female elk was pasturing unmindful of the savage struggle of the passion-mad males.41

Makita’s vision is reminiscent of the work of contemporary German animal painters like Richard Friese, who depicted various creatures according to Darwinian ideas of sexual selection, such as *Fighting Moose* of the 1890s, in
which females passively await the outcome of two battling males (figure 7.5). The secondary sexual characteristic of unnecessarily large horns alluded to by Makita was a favorite example of Darwin's to demonstrate the cumulative effect of sexual selection:

The development … of certain structures—of the horns, for instance, in certain stags—has been carried to a wonderful extreme which, as far as the general condition of life is concerned, must be slightly injurious to the male. From this fact, we learn that the advantages which favored males derive from conquering other males in battle or courtship and thus leaving a numerous progeny, have been in the long run greater than those derived from rather more perfect adaptation to the external condition of life.  

Dagny Juell was also featured as the desired female of a love triangle by the infatuated and mentally unstable Strindberg, who is haunted by Juell and Przybyszewski in his novel Inferno of 1897. In the mid-1890s, Munch executed a cycle of ink washes as studies for etchings (that never came to fruition) on the theme The First Human Beings. Munch would go back to these studies in 1908 when he entered Jacobson's clinic, after six years of obsessing over Tulla Larsen; at the same time, he worked on a series of writings beginning in 1903 called "The Diary of a Mad Poet." The illustrations eventually were produced as Alpha and Omega. This
Adam and Eve are prehistoric humans who inhabit an island. Connecting sexuality with the animal world, Munch follows the unfaithful Omega, who indulges in sexual liaisons with animals. She disappears across the water on a buck, then returns again. In a fit of jealous rage, Alpha kills Omega, while her hybrid children in turn murder him.

Kokoschka, who greatly admired Munch, is another artist who dwelt on the battle of the sexes and rejection. His play Murderer, Hope of Women of 1909 was inspired by Strindberg’s celebrated Darwinian play The Father, originally produced in 1888. However, unlike Darwin, who rejected the idea of a period of matriarchy in advance of male domination in the evolution of civilization, Kokoschka was interested in this idea, explicated in Bachofen’s Mother Right. Murderer is a prehistoric drama of love and death in which men and women have a violent clash to establish supremacy. The female leader is animal-like and sexual. In the end, in an allusion to male dominance and female weakness, the male leader kills everyone including his would-be Amazon adversaries. The psychological violence of disparities between the sexes and jealousy continued in plays like the adulterous Sphinx and the Strawman of 1913. 43

Kokoschka, like Munch, cultivated the state of loss. One of his first major works was an illustrated book Dreaming Boys (1908) written after a bitter break-up with Lilith Lang, who worked for the Wiener Werkstätte. 44 The theme is a sexual coming-of-age story of a young couple in which the boy experiences the “werewolf” within. Arguably his most prolific and important period occurred during his doomed relationship with Alma Mahler and its aftermath. The affair began in 1912 shortly after the death of Mahler’s husband, the composer Gustav Mahler. In 1915, Alma left Kokoschka for the architect Walter Gropius. The jealous and devastated artist spent the next several years attempting to revive her interest. He was wounded in the Great War in 1915 and was left on the battlefield for four days, an event he recalled later that year in the painting Knight Errant. In this painting, he lies helpless in a watery domain with Alma Mahler as a sphinx in the distance. He is also the suffering Christ; in the sky above appear the letters E.S. next to a tiny self-portrait. The letters refer to Christ’s final words “My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Unable to regain Alma’s affections, Kokoschka had a large, nude, stuffed doll made in her likeness down to details of her private parts, which he lived with and painted for a number of years (figure 7.6). He had the doll waited on, dressed, and served tea by a maid, and stories circulated about the Mahler doll being taken on outings by the artist. By 1918, he was known publicly as “the mad Kokoschka,” another example of a deranged modern artist.
Feathers and Gems

Another kind of elusive prize female also influenced the visual culture of the turn of the century: the woman dressed in gems and feathers. In one of his most transparent allusions to the authority of his own class and period of time, Darwin tied the fashion of Victorian feather hats and jewelry made of precious stones to sexual selection. He believed that, given the aesthetic sensibility of all creatures, the remarkable patterns or colors that might attract a female to a male in nonhuman species now transferred gender. According to Darwin, “Our women, both civilized and savage, deck their heads with borrowed plumes and use gems which are hardly more brilliantly colored than the naked skin and wattle of certain birds.” Women, he believed, perfectly aware of the power of their beauty in selection, “delight in decorating themselves.”

Darwin had spent many chapters of *Descent of Man* discussing sexual selection in birds, which he thought of as most closely connected with humans in terms of a sense of beauty and song. He insisted, “they have nearly the same sense of the beautiful that we do.” In his discussion of birds, Darwin had used the extraordinary case of the peacock to demonstrate the extent to which sexual selection might overshadow natural selection, since the brilliant colors and enormous fan of the male peacock would make him vulnerable to predators. It was this example that especially appealed to Symbolists of elegant beauties like the young woman portrayed in Edgar Maxence’s *Profile with Peacock* or Edmond Aman-Jean’s *Young Girl with a Peacock*. In a lithograph by Munch based on *Jealousy* (Munch museum, Oslo), the Edenic tree is transformed into a peacock's tail, while “Dagny” sensually yet coyly reveals but a
single breast. In Gauguin’s *Te Nave Nave Fenua* (*Tahitian Eve*, 1892), a nude with vestiges of two extra toes reaches out to pluck flowers that resemble peacock feathers.47 Gustav Klimt, who was much influenced by Darwin, created shimmering, patterned, elegant clothing of gold and bright colors that suggest gem inlays and sumptuous jewelry for his portraits of society women and voluptuous aquatic beauties.48 This unabashed womanizer (his many affairs included the young Alma) may have excused himself as hopelessly driven by sexual urges.

Many turn-of-the-century modern artists, whose work involved personal introspection, were affected by materialist explanations of mate choice and infidelities, much of which was based in Darwin’s view of the unforgiving nature of sexual selection. The pessimism of the period, in which misunderstandings of the nature of heredity led to concerns with degenerate family lines and the potentially lethal effects of accumulating bad habits, put modern artists in a vulnerable position. Some modernists, conditioned to consider themselves as physically tainted and socially peripheral, explored their own states of loss or inescapable atavistic behavior surrounding the sex drive.

NOTES


2. The bond between mother and child was an example cited by Darwin to demonstrate close continuities between humans and their animal kin.


5. For a discussion on the controversy over beauty in selection among nonhumans, see Helena Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock: Altruisms and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and chapter 2 of this volume.


7. Ibid., vol. 2, 373.


11. In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (1851; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Schopenhauer had written that "women exist in the main solely for the propagation of the species" and "live more for the species than the individual." He also speculated about the relationship between humans and apes.


15. Darwin used anthropomorphic descriptions of mating in quadrupedal animals, including the use of the terms "marriage" and "wives." Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol. 2, 361.


17. Charles Baudelaire, *Ecrits sur l'art*, with an introduction by F. Moulinier (1859; reprint, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992), 314: "L'orang-outang entrainant une femme au fond des bois (ouvrage refusé, que naturellement je n'ai pas vu) est bien l'idée d'un esprit que naturellement je n'ai pas vu), est bien l'idée d'un esprit pointu. Pourquoi pas un crocodile, un tigre, ou toute autre bête susceptible de manger une femme? Non pas! Sontil qu'il ne sait pas de manger, mais de violer. Or le singe seul, le singe gigantesque, à la fois plus et moins qu'un home, a manifesté quelquefois un appétit humain pour la femme." Baudelaire's error in assuming the creature was an orangutan had to do with its longer yet equally sensationalistic appearance in France. A live orangutan had been illustrated by Frémiet's instructor at the natural history museum, Jacques-Christophe Werner, in 1854 and in 1856 another was put on exhibition there,
inspiring speculation about the proximity of man to ape. When it died in 1837, it was stuffed and put on exhibition at the museum in the Ape Room in the Galeries de Zoologie, where it was visible to the public for decades to come.


20. The gorilla was first reported by the American physician Thomas Savage and Jeffries Wyman in 1847 and named Troglodytes gorilla (Savage).

21. Frémiet had worked at the museum as an illustrator beginning when he was sixteen years old. Here he became familiar with animal anatomy and then successfully transferred his training to the human body in his subsequent work for the dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, Marc Joseph Bonaventura Orfila i Rorger. He also studied in the sculpture studio of François Rude and thus, had a dual background in science and art. For additional information on Frémiet’s background, see Thièsbaux-Sisson, "Au jour le jour," 187; and T. H. Bartlett, "Emmanuel Frémiet," American Architect and Building News 31, no. 788 (31 January 1891): 72–73; 32, no. 805 (30 May 1891): 139–31.


28. Vogt also supported the ape-human relationship in his Lectures on Man, 1896.


34. Ibid., 69.


36. Klinger dedicated his lithographic series *Eve and the Future* to Krohg and exhibited the series in Kristiania in 1880.


39. Ibid., 86.


41. Ibid., 126.

42. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol. 2, 279.

43. For a discussion of sexual jealousy as the organizing component of Kokoschka's plays, see Carol Diethe, *Aspects of Distorted Sexual Attitudes in German Expressionist Drama* (New York: Peter Lang), 146–79.


46. Ibid.

47. "Tahitian Eve" was put on exhibition in Paris in 1893 when Gauguin returned from Tahiti. Strindberg saw it there and may have commented on it to Munch. The "flowers" also appear as illustration in Gauguin's *Ancien Culte Mahorite* (13 and back cover). The image was distributed through translation into prints as Gauguin attempted to familiarize the public with his work. The critic Théophile-A. Sisson referred to the woman in evolutionary terms as a *quadrumanesia*. Gauguin accepted the description and commented, "She is Eve after the Fall, still able to go about unclothed without being immodest, preserving all her animal beauty as in the first day... Like Eve, the body is still an animal thing. But the head has progressed with evolution, thought has developed sublety, love has impressed an ironical smile on her lips..." For a discussion on Gauguin and evolution, see Martha Lucy, "The Evolutionary Body: Refiguring the Nude in Post-Darwinian French Art," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2004.