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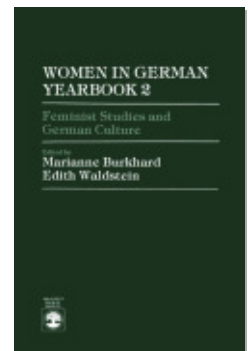
"Männlich im Sinne des Butt" or "Am Ende angekommen?":
Images of Men in Contemporary German-Language Literature by
Women

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"Männlich im Sinne des Butt" or
"Am Ende angekommen?"

Images of Men in Contemporary German-Language
Literature by Women*

REGULA VENSKE

Und es ist an der Zeit, sich um die
Männerfrage zu kümmern, historisch,
politisch, sittlich und so weiter --
vom stehenden Heer über Maschinerie
und Männlichkeit bis zum Vater-
schaftskult.¹

(And it is time to concern ourselves
with the man question, historically,
politically, morally and so on --
all the way from the standing army
through machinery and masculinity on
up to the cult of fatherhood.)

The study of images of women in (male-authored) literature has become an established part of the current repertoire of feminist literary criticism. The prejudice against topics such as "women in _____," defined in 1979 by Wolfgang Paulsen as one of those which have always "enabled the less far-reaching intellects to complete their journeyman's service in Germanistik,"² has meanwhile been thoroughly refuted, both by the published studies available and their diverse methodological procedures -- ideological, socio-psychological and psychoanalytical critical approaches as well as those grounded in social history and the history of myth.³ Yet even while feminist research was extending the traditional field of inquiry, it has for the most part limited itself to the issue of the image of women. A possible paradigm shift has only recently been suggested in the thematization of masculinity also.⁴

The decoding of images of women necessarily involves arduous work on male projections and male discourse about "femininity" before the "hidden woman" behind the images can be discovered. Studying images

of men created by women could, on the other hand, signify one further offensive step out of the narrow framework of images mirrored by men, out of the circle of women's narcissistic quests for identity, and out of the experiences of suffering and victimization of a sex that is still evolving.

Coming to grips with the man question would necessitate a new way of thematizing the relationship of the sexes, the prescribed polarity of sexual characteristics, and the deficiency of reality. However, caution is advisable here: It most emphatically cannot be the task of a feminist-oriented literary criticism to scrutinize "images of men" thematically through literary history, by analogy to "images of women." Nor should we attempt, with methodological naiveté, to draw conclusions as to the reality of the "menfolk" behind the images. Stating the problem this way -- perhaps in contrast to depictions of men in "male literature" -- will lead only to banalities, for the "menfolk" are by no means hidden in literature. Their place, unlike women's, is definitely locatable, occupied and well protected. Nor can our concern be that proposed in the almost quaint monograph Der Typus des Mannes in der Dichtung der Frau by Else Hoppe: to redefine the theme of "the figure, image and ideal of woman in the writing of this or that man" by replacing the subject with the object, i.e., "the bearer of the consequences with the object toward which his activity is directed."⁵ This simple reversal of the theme, in an act of primal will, leaps over the real exclusion of women from literature and patriarchal society as a whole.

Woman writing about man writes as object about the subject, as un-real sex about the "real" one, as "other" about the male as human being. Thus, the issue is precisely how her view of men is related to her view of herself; the extent to which she reproduces, for example, her own dependence and the male's superiority; how she can develop her identity against/with/without the male. We must ask how woman comes to grips with her own sex and even with her own "masculinity" as well as how woman can imagine herself and the male beyond patriarchal principles. The point of departure and the goal of these questions is not only, or not so much, the reality of the "menfolk," but women's reality and fantasy, with bias in favor of women's development in the sense of a "real" sex that is identical with itself as well as of the development of a "real" literature by women.

The goal of decoding images of women is to liberate woman from the status of object that is ascribed to her in male philosophical and literary discourse. "Do not make me a desk 'to write upon,' I humbly pray ..." wrote Mary Wollstonecraft to William Godwin.⁶ Even in examining images of men in women's literature, the issue is that of woman's becoming the subject (die Subjektwerdung der Frau). However, it cannot be our concern to arrive, in a simple reversal of the subject-object relation, at a mere objectification of the male -- this would not be a satisfying or significant goal either in terms of social utopia or aesthetic praxis, for feminists are concerned precisely with suspending and overcoming dualisms as prescribed in such oppositional pairs as male/female, subject/object, active/passive, etc.

In a different sense, Barbara Sichtermann has written of "women's difficulty in constructing objects, and the consequences of these difficulties for love."⁷

"Objekte bilden" -- das muss nicht gleich ein Bezwingen sein. Objekte können ja Widerstand bieten. Es heisst zunächst nur: sich selbst in ein aktives Verhältnis zur Welt setzen . . . 'Objekte bilden' hiesse dann zugreifen, aneignen. Aber auch: Distanz herstellen, um zu beobachten, zu betrachten und um die Aufmerksamkeit wieder abzuwenden. Es hiesse, ein Ding, einen Menschen oder eine Vielfalt von Dingen und Menschen für sich setzen, isolieren und wissen wollen, was es mit ihm, mit ihr auf sich hat . . . Ein Prozess, in dem beide, Subjekt und Objekt, sich verändern können. (Sichtermann, pp. 71-72)

("Constructing objects" doesn't have to mean a conquest. Objects can offer resistance, after all. It means first of all simply placing oneself in an active relationship to the world. . . . "Constructing objects" would then mean taking hold of, appropriating, but also creating distance for observing, watching and turning one's attention away again. It would mean wanting to place

apart, to isolate a person or a variety of things and people to find out what is going on with them A process in which both subject and object may change.)

In this sense the question of images of men in literature by women could signify two things: criticism of the masculine (i.e., distancing, separation, estrangement to the point of revenge fantasies and the like) as well as expression of a female desire: taking pleasure in the male, the utopia of the New Man.

Criticism and desire, "object-construction" in relation to men and to women's becoming the subject -- analysis of images of men in literature by women must develop a methodological procedure that will enable us to grasp the dialectic between image-reality (e.g., the socio-historical role and situation of the male in our society, which must be criticized) and the image of man as a projection or construction of woman (as it might be interpreted in relation to female identity, for example, psychoanalytically).

Eigentlich ist es von untergeordneter Bedeutung, wie die Männer sind; die Frage ist, wie ich sie auffasse.

(Actually, the way men are is of lesser significance; the question is, how do I interpret them.)

Herdis Møllehave puts these words in the mouth of her heroine in the novel Le und die Knotenmänner. As part of this dialectic understanding of an image-outline, however, she then proceeds to criticize a specific male type, the "Knotenmänner" (knotmen) and, among other things, unmasks their alleged strength as dearth of feeling and inability to love.

In the following discussion I wish to offer several examples of interpretation. I will restrict myself to two basic topoi of bourgeois-patriarchal masculinity which can be found again and again in one form or another as central themes in literature by women: (1) the absence and/or inaccessibility of the male, especially the father but (figuratively) also the woman's male love partner and (2) men's inability to love.

The absence of the male for the female appears to be a basic structure of bourgeois-patriarchal masculinity. It should be seen as crisscrossing the familiar feminist conceptual duality of "male presence" versus "female absence." Here, the "locus" of female presence is everyday life itself, with all the banality, particularism and triviality that constitute it. By contrast to an understanding of female absence, which is an absence of sense of meaning and expresses female powerlessness in history, male absence as described in literature by women represents as such a piece of patriarchal power, serving the preservation and exercise of authority: meaning is constituted and dominance is assured through distance and unapproachability.

"Er hatte sich zurückgezogen. Demütigung, Zurechtweisung durch Unerreichbarkeit." (He had withdrawn. The humiliation, being reprimanded by his inaccessibility.) This is how Elisabeth Plessen describes the basic structure of her relationship with her father in her autobiographical book Mitteilung an den Adel (Such Sad Tidings).⁹ This father's major characteristic is his inaccessibility, his quality of "absenting" himself (cf. Plessen, p. 65).

"Er wollte nicht gestört sein. Für seine Kinder blieb er der grosse Unsichtbare, der Fremde." (Plessen, p. 30) (He didn't want to be disturbed. To his children he remained the great invisible one, the stranger.) The father's inaccessibility is inscribed in the text as an essential motivating structure. Writing, the daughter attempts to produce closeness, to conjure up and comprehend/apprehend her father in her words. She does so all the more because she sees her father's inaccessibility reproduced in her partner-relationship with Felix. In another context we find: "Das war das Quälendste: die Wiederholung." (Plessen, p. 37) (That was the worst torment: the repetition.) And, concerning her friend:

Und wir, Felix? Ich fühle mich, als jagte ich hinter dir her. Und du sicherst dich ab, vor mir? Bist verschwunden, bleibst unauffindbar
 (Plessen, p. 38; cf. also pp. 29, 57, 130f.)

(And us, Felix? I feel as if I'm chasing along behind you. And you're making yourself secure --

from me? You've disappeared, you
can't be found . . .)

We also find this structure of repetition and projection in the two other texts about fathers discussed here.

Brigitte Schwaiger's literary confrontation with her father, Lange Abwesenheit (Long Absence), contains in its very title the paradigm of the father/daughter relationship and, figuratively, also of the male/female relationship in our society.¹⁰ At the very beginning she writes about the father: "Du warst so wichtig, dass man dich nur selten sehen konnte." (Schwaiger, p. 7) (You were so important that one could only rarely see you.) She understands her father's "unapproachability" (cf. Schwaiger, p. 85), not only as his personal characteristic, but extends it to a definition of the father in general: "Ein Vater, ein richtiger Vater, ist einer, den man nicht umarmen darf" (Schwaiger, p. 19) (A father, a real father, is one you can't put your arms around) She can only approach her father as he is dying:

. . . so nah und so lange wie im
ganzen Leben niemals. Ich
vergewaltige ihn zu Zärtlichkeit.
(Schwaiger, p. 78)

(Never in my whole life this close
or this long. I rape him to
affectionateness.)

And finally the dead father's grave becomes the locus of his presence. Here, he can no longer back away from his daughter's monolog.

Man kann ihm jetzt Liebe geben, ohne
sich der Gefahr einer Abweisung
auszusetzen. Tote können einem
nicht mehr vorschreiben, wie sie
geliebt werden wollen. (Schwaiger,
p. 20)

(Now one can love him without danger
of being rejected. Dead people can
no longer dictate the way they want
you to love them.)

Thus the daughter's mourning also contains a trace of triumph over the fact that her father can no longer

offer resistance. As a whole, this monologic form of confrontation with the father exhibits a paradoxical attitude: it is her recognition of the father's now definitive absence and her mourning of his inaccessibility, but at the same time it is the posthumous literary representation of inaccessibility, its realization and, to a certain extent, reconciliation. Through the father's death, his absence is also legitimized; he has now withdrawn by permission. The father's death is thus on the one hand the final confirmation of his ever effective inaccessibility:

Als ich begriff, dass du sterben würdest, nahm ich es dir übel, dass du einfach fortgingst, ohne jemals für mich vorhanden gewesen zu sein. (Schwaiger, p. 8)

(When I realized you were going to die, I resented it that you were simply leaving without ever having been available to me.)

On the other hand, the father's death also creates a condition for the daughter to be able to produce, by writing, the fiction of a closeness to him. In this, the daughter's writing is represented, like in Plessen's book, as an attempt to revoke the father's absence. There, a passage about the father reads: "C.A. -- die ewige Gegenwart?" (Plessen, p. 170) (C.A. -- the eternal present?) Schwaiger's father is also excessively present in his absence. Strictly speaking, her monolog is about the presence of the father's absence, a presence that has the character of a godly omnipresence and omnipotence.

Er ist tot, aber ich kämpfe gegen ihn, noch immer. Er hat viele Stimmen, viele Arme und Beine, ist unsichtbar und kann mir jederzeit und überall auflauern. (Schwaiger, p. 88)

(He's dead, but I'm still struggling against him. He has many voices, many arms and legs; he's invisible and might be lying in wait for me any time, anywhere.)

Above all, her father remains omnipresent in her love relationship to Birrer (cf. Schwaiger, p. 48), with

whom she reproduces her dependence on her father and the structure of inaccessibility and the closeness/distance ambivalence (cf. Schwaiger, pp. 38, 40, 44). In her relationship to the Jewish Birer, the daughter experiences her father's Nazi prejudices, which live on in her to a greater degree than she would have thought possible.¹¹ For her, Birer is both father-substitute and (Jewish) counter-pole to the (antisemitic) father. Her relationship to him is characterized by a masochistic attitude, a readiness to be humiliated and punished. But she also uses Birer as a means to an end, assigning him the role of an exorcist who is to liberate and absolve her from her father's prejudices. Thus, as the idea of atonement in her relationship to him is carried to its greatest extreme, she still remains dependent on his absolution. She wants Birer not only as a tool of her protest against her father, but also as a proxy for her life (cf. Schwaiger, pp. 37ff., 40). In attempting to break away from her father, she makes herself a victim once again. To a far greater degree than Plessen, Schwaiger remains trapped in an ambivalent, even contradictory structure in her writing. She succeeds neither in revoking her father's absence in favor of an active closeness nor in revoking the father's absence in the sense of a separation and liberation on her side, emanating from her own needs and activities. Instead, her father still continues to serve as a legitimizing force, just as he conferred sense and existence on her as a child (cf. Schwaiger, pp. 20f.). Instead, he legitimizes her very writing. Just as her mother had borrowed forcefulness from the father, since she lacked authority (cf. Schwaiger, p. 21), she herself takes out a loan from her father, incorporating his power and significance. The dead father even guarantees the significance of her writing. The very theme sanctions its special importance. A somewhat overstated summary of her position would be as follows:

Although Birer is the expression of her opposition to her father, it is also true that:

She "has permission" to enter into a sexual relationship with Birer because he is a substitute for her father. And in the same way:

Although the book is a "settling of accounts" with her father, it is also true that:

Because she is writing about her father, she has permission to write -- about herself. For that is what the text is really about.

The relationship between the quest for one's

father and self-presentation is also clear in Barbara Bronnen's autobiographical roman à clef Die Tochter (The Daughter),¹² in which she confronts her father, author Arnolt Bronnen (the Alfret Bebra of the novel). Here too we are dealing with the "Suche nach dem Vater" (quest for the father; Bronnen, p. 119). He is a "Schreibtischtäter" (writing-desk perpetrator) who would "write and, while writing, withdraw" (Bronnen, p. 50).

So war es ein Leben lang geblieben,
bis er starb: dass sie ihm nachlief
und nachschrieb und die Spur nicht
fand, die zu seinem Zimmer führte.
Und ihr Vater, der war anders-
wo . . . (Bronnen, p. 119)

(It had been that way for a life-
time, until he died: she would run
after him, write after him, but
couldn't find the trail that led to
his room. And her father -- he was
someplace else)

Several passages in the book reveal how difficult it is to break out of the narcissistic circle. She does succeed up to a point in unmasking the myth of her father's absence. After she recognizes that the dead fathers are happy and the living mothers unhappy (Bronnen, p. 164), she is finally able to state programmatically: "Die Väter sind tot, die toten Männer ihrer Schönheit beraubt." (Bronnen, p. 188) (The fathers are dead; the dead men have been robbed of their beauty.) This insight comes to her in a kind of mystical dream she has while traveling and feeling "close" to her father (cf. Bronnen, pp. 185ff.). "Sie war durch ein Gerümpel von Vergangenheit gefahren." (cf. Bronnen, p. 190) (She had gone through a junk-pile of the past.) -- Following Cixous, this dream-journey, and by extension the novel as a whole, could be understood as "trans-père."¹³

After waking up from the dream she carries a "new, unfamiliar father inside her," whom she had to "treat carefully so he wouldn't break in two before he was born" (Bronnen, pp. 189-90). Similarly, in the process of writing itself, she realizes that her father was "ein abgestandener Mythos" (a worn-out myth; Bronnen, p. 194); that he was a construction of her longing, a

"Verwechslung" (mistaken identity; Bronnen, p. 161) ever since her childhood.

However, in transferring this to other relationships with men, she does not yet achieve liberation because the closeness/distance ambivalence is her own problem. Thinking about the father of her child, from whom she is separated, for example:

Vergiss nicht . . . dass du auch die
Ferne brauchst, die er hat, um dich
ihm nah zu fühlen, und dass du
besser liebst, wenn du weniger
liebst. (Bronnen, p. 44)

(Don't forget . . . that you also
need the distance that he has in
order to feel close to him, and that
you love better when you love less.)

The question that ought to follow here is whether she wants to be close to the man, or merely to feel close to him.

Here again we are dealing, in relation to the male love-partner, with ambivalence and projections which are directly connected to the "father-riddle" (Vater-Rätsel; Bronnen, p. 175).

Aber so war er: Entweder er war
nicht da, oder er war da als einer,
der vom Olymp kam, Übermächtiges
forderte, und es war seinetwegen,
dass sie die Männer nicht ein-
schätzen lernte. (Bronnen, p. 128)

(But that's the way he was: Either
he wasn't there, or he was there
like someone descended from Mount
Olympus, demanding overwhelming
things, and it was because of him
that she hadn't learned to
appreciate men.)

Acquiring distance borne by love occupies in particular her feelings toward her son Jonas, whose "masculinity" she as mother reproduces. "Happy that he was a son" (Bronnen, p. 65), she is able to save him from the recurring chain of symbiotic mother-daughter relationships in her family. Still, she also reproduces phallic structures, for example by thinking of

her son as her "Balance-Stab" (balance-stick), or when she discovers "her father's look in his eyes" (cf. Bronnen, p. 34; p. 190).

She attributes "something remarkably masculine" to the little boy, and is reassured that he is "no dreamer, no loony" (Spinner), no "bleeding heart" (Sehnsüchtiger; Bronnen, p. 40). In so doing, she -- herself seeking the "wahnsinnige(n) Traumtänzer" (insane dream-dancer; Bronnen, p. 105) -- creates obstacles to the upbringing and the future of the "New Man."

Bronnen's novel ends in a trite and clichéd fairy-tale-dream image which ultimately propagates resignation and adaptation to prevailing conditions. Even early on we read:

Ich kann Mann und Frau nicht sehen,
zusammen, Hand in Hand, ich kann es
nicht sehen, ausser in meinen
Träumen. (Bronnen, p. 31)

(I can't see man and woman together,
hand in hand, I can't see it except
in my dreams.)

"Schau sie dir doch an," sagte
Katharina [i.e., the novel's
heroine, Barbara Bronnen's alter ego
-- RV], "die Männer um uns herum.
Die Auswahl ist nicht gross. Alle
sind sie auf der Flucht: vor den
Frauen, in die Arbeit Jeder
Ältere: gebrochen. Die Jüngeren:
sich gar nicht erst aussetzend. Wer
ist schon darunter, der uns wirklich
erkennen will?" (Bronnen, p. 41)

(Take a look at them, the men
around us. The selection isn't
large. All of them are on the run:
fleeing from women, fleeing to their
work Every older one --
broken. The younger ones -- not
taking any chances. Who among them
really wants to recognize us?)

Bronnen places the absence of men for women in a context of their inability to love: "denn sie haben uns in sich abgeschafft, die Männer" (for they've gotten

themselves rid of us, those men; Bronnen, p. 254). We will take up this theme again later.

What is problematical in Bronnen's novel is that the heroine, who simultaneously hated and idolized her father (cf. Bronnen, p. 120), also simultaneously criticizes, rejects and admires men in general. The following passage is an example of this structure, in which criticism of the masculine does an about-face, switching to an identification with it and female self-hate:

Und sie würde sie genauso hinter sich herlaufen lassen, die Frauen, wenn sie ein Mann wäre, und weitergehen, weil sie diese sehnstüchtige Haltung und diese flehentlichen Gebärden nicht würde ertragen können. Sie kniete innerlich vor Walter [i.e., dem Vater ihres Kindes -- RV] und flehte ihn an, kein solcher Mann zu sein, wie sie einer sein würde (Bronnen, pp. 46f.)

(And she would let them run after her the very same way, these women, if she were a man, and keep on going. Because she wouldn't be able to stand that yearning attitude and those pleading gestures. Inwardly she knelt before Walter her child's father and implored him not to be the kind of man she would be)

Here again the utopia of male inaccessibility is conjured up. This cycle between father and son, between the beloved man and the utopia of one's own masculinity is kept in motion by a single force: rejection of the mother. It could also be shown in Elisabeth Plessen's and Brigitte Schwaiger's works that hatred of the mother and the unresolved mother-daughter relationship drives the daughter to turn to the father.

In Bronnen's work the ideal of the father can also be seen in the distance he maintained from the mother. In this, he was a role model for his daughter, who wishes to free herself from symbiosis with her mother. Ironically, she is also fleeing from symbiosis with her mother by venturing to the locus of her father's inaccessibility: the written word.

Besides conjuring up the father's absence and inaccessibility and carrying the relationship with one's father over to the closeness/distance ambivalence vis-à-vis the male love-partner, the three books discussed here have something more in common: being occupied with the father seems also to serve the purpose of resisting and avoiding the mother-problematic. Her absence is not lamented but simply established, by literary means. In assigning her (literary) unimportance, the daughters actually perpetuate the law of the father.

The absence and inaccessibility of the male -- not just the father -- is inscribed as suffering and desire in other texts of recent women's literature as well, for example in Karin Struck's work. Her very first work, Klassenliebe, involved conjuring up the unapproachable Z. and her relation to him. And whether her subsequent texts deal with the father, "that strange man who was always absent,"¹⁴ or with diverse lovers, "diese Todesangstmänner" (fear-unto-death-men) "with their fear of closeness" (Struck, Lieben, p. 360; p. 98), there is always "Trennung als Motor des Schreibens" (separation as the motor of writing).¹⁵

Struck attempts in her writing to revoke the separation and produce the desired symbiosis with the male. In Kindheits Ende we read: "Im Schreiben bin ich noch einmal mit dir symbiotisch verbunden." (In writing I am symbiotically connected to you once again.)¹⁶ I think this should be understood not only in terms of content; rather, even her relationship to the text is symbiotic.¹⁷ In this, Karin Struck presents a model of female writing that one encounters rather frequently during the 1970s. In Karin Petersen's separation story Das fette Jahr, the absent (male) beloved becomes a fiction, a blank space of female ability to love and/or willingness to adapt. One learns virtually nothing about the ominous Karl whose absence causes the first-person narrator so much suffering; he is utterly absorbed in the woman's projections. For her, the separation develops into an experience of the longed-for symbiosis with him. About his absence, we read "Nur wenn ich allein bin, bin ich in ihm" (Only when I'm alone am I in him),¹⁸ or "Immer war Karl da. Randvoll mit Karl war ich . . ." (Karl was always there. I was brimful with Karl . . . ; Peterson, p. 46). Her "Forderung nach dem Einklang Du Ich Sein" (demand for harmony you I being; Peterson, p. 46) indicates the problem she has defining herself

apart from a man. This is a problem she has yet to work out, in a different way, with her mother also, and indicates the subject-object confusion which her own lack of identity projects onto men.

"Warten auf das Eigentliche. . . . War es Karl?" (Peterson, p. 110) (Waiting for the real thing. . . . Was it Karl?). In experiencing separation, however, she has to recognize that her own distance and indifference, and her own sadness were what she transferred to Karl in the symbiotic structure of her feelings: "Ich hatte mir selbst das angetan." (Peterson, p. 214) (I did that to myself). However, writing as an attempt to produce authenticity fails in this case; the female I remains locked in the tautology of its identity, or non-identity, expressed in the formula "Ich bin ich."¹⁹

This problematic is taken to an extreme in Svende Merians Der Tod des Märchenprinzen (The Death of the Fairy Prince).²⁰ Here again we are dealing with the autobiographical processing of a separation from a man -- though one ought also to ask how there can be a separation from someone there was never any real closeness to.

In nothing short of grandiose naiveté, a woman here describes the contradictions between her "feminist" awareness and her real need for dependence; she describes not taking her own needs seriously, her lack of self-criticism and distance from herself and her environment, and the structurelessness of her self -- the consequences of her own separation difficulties. Already in Karin Petersen's book, symbiosis with the male had become especially clear at the point where she cannot accept the supposedly beloved man as being-for-himself:

Karls Schlaf beunruhigte mich. Er war so weit von mir entfernt, so unwiderrufbar für sich, dass meine Gedanken ununterbrochen um ihn kreisten. . . . Ich beneidete ihn um diesen Schlaf, dieses Ruhen für sich, während ich willenlos den kreisenden Gedanken ausgesetzt war. . . . (Petersen, p. 119)

(Karl's sleep made me uneasy. He was so far away from me, so irrevocably for himself, that my

thoughts kept circling incessantly about him. . . . I envied him this sleep, this resting for himself, while I was at the mercy of my circling thoughts. . . .)

A similar passage is found in Svende Merian, but it is more blatantly dogmatic:

Ich liege wach, und der Kerl schläft. Ich weiss, dass ich ihn wieder wecken werde. Das weiss ich. Ich mache nicht alleine eine schlaflose Nacht durch. . . . Ich habe das Recht, ihn zu wecken! (Merian, p. 199).

(I lie awake and this guy is sleeping. I know I'm going to wake him up again. I know it. I'm not going through a sleepless night alone. . . . I have the right to wake him up!)

In symbiosis with the "fairy prince," the woman constantly produces relationship-traps, "double-bind" situations in which ultimately everything he does can only be wrong: she wants him to be chivalrous but if he were chivalrous she would call him a male chauvinist pig. In rejecting a male-defined sexuality she defiantly throws out the baby with the bath water: "Ich will keinen Orgasmus. Was hab ich davon?" (I don't want an orgasm. What do I get out of it? Merian, p. 78). She doesn't allow the man to satisfy her, but then throws his inability to empathize up to him. Since she is not critically aware of her own contradictory signals, she constantly reproduces the kinds of situations and behaviors (by the other person) that she suffers from. Somewhat as in Karin Struck's work, dependency is described as a woman's addiction to a man: she is "addicted" to him, "drunk" on him, she "has a relapse" (wird rückfällig; cf. Merian, pp. 236, 239, 290). Writing as withdrawal-therapy -- "Damit ich aufhöre, ihn zu lieben" (so I'll stop loving him; Merian, p. 226) -- ultimately perpetuates this addiction, becomes an addiction itself.

Ich schreibe dieses Buch für mich.
Und für Arne. . . . Indem (!) ich
das Buch für Arne schreibe, schreibe
ich es aber auch für mich. . . .

Damit wir uns wenigstens dieses Stückchen näher sind. . . . Vielleicht würde er durch das Buch merken, dass er mich in Wirklichkeit auch liebt (Merian, p. 227)

(I'm writing this book for me. And for Arne. . . . But by writing this book for Arne, I'm also writing it for myself. . . . So we come at least this little bit closer to each other. . . . Maybe the book would make him notice that in reality he loves me too.)

The danger of "women's novels" like Svende Merian's is that their criticism of men and "masculinity" comes back to women like a boomerang, blaming them for their miseries -- after all, it is they who are reproducing their own dependency and oppression.²¹ Woman's criticism of male "lack of feeling," "coldness" (cf. Merian, pp. 112, 113), and "Kaputter Rationalismus" (rationalism gone amuck, Merian, p. 116) is relativized and made harmless by the absurdity of her "ohnmächtige(n), hilflosen(n) Wut" (powerless, helpless rage; Merian, p. 245).

Arne soll weggehen!
Aber er ist ja gar nicht da.
Ich will, dass er hier ist, damit
ich ihm zeigen kann, dass ich jetzt
wirklich will, dass er abhaut.
(Merian, p. 242; cf. also p. 244.)

(I want Arne to leave!
But he isn't here. I want him
here so I can show him I really want
him to get out of here now.)

Still, the large editions in which these texts appear, and doubtless also the extreme readiness of female readers to identify with them, indicate that they nevertheless contain, in whatever epigonic²² or trivialized form, a kernel of truth that points to communication problems between the sexes and the reality of a "masculinity" that is perceived as destructive and incapable of love.

"Das Liebesverbot" (No Love Allowed) is the title of a story by Karin Struck in which she depicts her father as her first great love and as "Liebesverbot":

she is forbidden to love him and to love others besides him (cf. Struck, Kindheits Ende, pp. 499-523). Men don't want to be loved, and they themselves cannot love. Inability to love probably represents a fundamental topos of criticism of the masculine in literature by women, and it is by no means restricted to explicitly feminist texts of the women's movement.

In the sex-change story "Selbstversuch" (Self-Experiment),²³ Christa Wolf's female scientist, who has been transformed into a man, discovers the secret of male power and invulnerability: indifference. In Der geteilte Himmel (1963), Wolf had still conceived of male indifference in more strongly political terms, as a reaction to the experience of fascism and the war in Germany, but here she understands indifference as a patriarchal principle:

Ihre kunstvoll aufgebauten Regelsysteme, Ihre heillose Arbeitswut, all Ihre Manöver, sich zu entziehen, waren nichts als der Versuch, sich vor der Entdeckung abzusichern: Dass Sie nicht lieben können und es wissen. (Wolf, p. 99)

(Your artfully constructed systems of rules, your hopeless addiction to work, all your withdrawal maneuvers were nothing other than an attempt to protect yourself from a discovery: that you cannot love, and you know it.)

Women's mourning of men's inability to love and to know/recognize (erkennen) is a prevailing theme of contemporary women's literature. For example, it appears already in Geno Hartlaub's 1953 novel Die Tauben von San Marco (The Doves of San Marco). Here also the problem of male inability to love is associated with German history, the Second World War:

Wir haben das Töten vor dem Lieben gelernt und beides ein wenig zu früh. Als ich so alt war wie du, hatte ich das alles schon hinter mir, war erledigt, fertig, wie ausgebrannt. Darum konnte ich das, was dann später kam, nie mehr so richtig ernst nehmen.²⁴

(We learned killing before we learned loving, and both of them a little too soon. When I was your age I had already done it all; I'd had it, I was finished, burned out. That's why I couldn't really take seriously what came later.)

Here, a husband is speaking to his wife, about half his age, on their wedding trip. In marrying this young and inexperienced woman he wants to balance out his own deficits -- as a man of the world, he has too many experiences. He mystifies her innocence and virginity, and can only see the image he has made of her. She must put up a fight against his image-making: "Dass er nicht merkte, wie erniedrigend diese Erhöhung war" (To think that he didn't notice how demeaning this exaltation was ; Hartlaub, p. 55).

A comparable constellation of problems can also be found in Hilde Domin's homecoming novel Das zweite Paradies (The Second Paradise).²⁵ Here, the husband wants his wife the way she used to be, before a crisis in their marriage. He constantly -- nomen est omen, his name is Constantine -- holds fast to the image of her that was convenient for him. That is his way of loving. She, on the other hand, consciously refuses to accept this image and the expectations associated with it:

Sie hatte das Gefühl, er lege sie in ein Kinderbett und verlange die Amputation dessen, was überstände. Prokrustesbett seines Traums, es ängstigte sie manchmal. (Domin, p. 67)

(She felt as if he were putting her into a child's bed and calling for what hung over the edges to be amputated. Procrustean bed of his dreams, it worried her sometimes.)

Sie wollte es nicht mehr. Sie konnte es nicht mehr wollen. Sie wollte jetzt beides mit ihm teilen, den Traum und auch die Wirklichkeit Sie wollte einen Mann neben sich sehen, keinen Knaben. (Domin, pp. 87f.)

(She didn't want to anymore. She couldn't want to anymore. She wanted to share both things with him now, dream and reality. . . . She wanted a man beside her, not a boy.)

In struggling to change his image, all she can do is hope: "wenn er mich nähme, wie ich bin," "wenn es keine Schuld mehr wäre, ich selbst zu sein" (If he would only take me the way I am. If it were no longer a sin to be myself; Domin, pp. 105 and 106).

Recognition of the connection between male image-production with respect to "the feminine" and male inability to love vis-à-vis real women leads first of all -- in both literature and literary criticism -- to the conclusion that women must reject and unmask the female images men have made before they can imagine being able to "construct objects" themselves, to formulate and express their own desire with respect to men.

A female self-consciousness is becoming more prominent, in contrast to the definition of female narcissism as proposed by Freud (woman has a stronger need to be loved, as compared to the active male sex role -- to love). I call this development the capacity for forward loving (Fähigkeit des offensiven Liebens), in contrast to men's emotional mutilation and their "economy of separation" (Ökonomie der Trennung).²⁶

To illustrate with a passage from Ingeborg Bachmann's story "Das Dreissigste Jahr" (The Thirtieth Year):

Gebt zu, dass ihr, wo ihr wirklich bezahlt, mit eurem Leben, es nur jenseits der Sperre tut, wenn ihr Abschied genommen habt von allem, was euch so teuer ist -- auf Landeplätzen, Flugbasen . . . , Weiterreisende, denen es, um Ankommen nicht zu tun sein darf!²⁷

(Admit that when you really pay, with your lives, you only do it on the other side of the barricade, when you've taken leave of everything that is so dear to you, on landing-stages, airbases . . . , You travellers who dare not be

concerned about arriving!)

The "hero" of this story is a conditional person, a man without qualities (Mann ohne Eigenschaften):

Bei jeder Gelegenheit hatte er ja gesagt zu einer Freundschaft, zu einer Liebe, zu einem Ansinnen, und all dies immer auf Probe, auf Abruf. Die Welt schien ihm kündbar, er selbst sich kündbar. (Bachmann, Werke II, p. 96)

(At every opportunity he had consented to a friendship, to a love affair, to an expectation, and all this always on probation, subject to recall. The world seemed recallable to him, he himself seemed so.)

Er liebte eine Milliarde Frauen, alle gleichzeitig und ohne Unterschied. (Bachmann, Werke II, p. 102)

(He loved a billion women, all at the same time and without differentiating.)

Appropriately, the women he is involved with all bear some form of the same name. Finally, however, he meets the woman, the nameless one; he encounters "die unglaubliche Liebe" (unbelievable love; Bachmann, Werke II, p. 115). While fleeing from love he writes "for the first time" to his father for help. The patriarchal system vis-à-vis women is ensured; the "return of the prodigal son" follows (cf. Bachmann, Werke II, p. 118).

But the patriarchal system's integrative power is already brittle:

Aber sie sind ausser Kurs gesetzt, diese Münzen, mit denen ihr klimpert, ihr wisst es nur noch nicht. (Bachmann, Werke II, p. 103)

(But they've been withdrawn from circulation, these coins you're jingling; you just don't know it yet.)

The invalidation of patriarchal currency could lead to various literary strategies and utopias. Christa Reinig has playfully and self-ironically transformed the work of mourning women's implication in the "incurable disease of men."²⁸ In her novel Entmannung (Demanning), we find:

Von hier und heute hat sich die
Weltgeschichte geändert. . . .
Männer²⁹ sind Unfug. Schluss mit
ihnen.

(Starting here and now, world
history is changed. . . . Men are a
nuisance. Enough of them!)

Yet, "demanning" refers less to physical castration of men than to psychological renunciation of the masculinity mania in women. At the same time it becomes clear that the major male character's transformation into a woman, which is to be understood as the male chauvinist's strategy of adapting when faced with the possibility of female dominance, leads only to a softening of his identity. The "hard kernel" remains; this type of feminization of a man changes nothing in his status of oppressor and exploiter. Svende Merian has stated it more simply: "Ein Softi ist ein Chauvi, der Kreide gefressen hat" (Merian, p. 178) (A pro-feminist man is a male chauvinist who has eaten chalk)

So the question, the longing for the "New Man" is expressed over and over in literature by women. In Ingeborg Bachmann, hope is expressed despite knowledge to the contrary:

. . . und solange es diesen Neuen
Mann nicht gab, konnte man nur
freundlich sein und gut zueinander,
eine Weile. Mehr war nicht daraus
zu machen, und es sollten die Frauen
und die Männer am besten Abstand
halten, nichts zu tun haben mitein-
ander, bis beide herausgefunden
hatten aus einer Verwirrung und der
Verstörung, der Unstimmigkeit aller
Beziehungen (Bachmann, "Drei
Wege zum See," Werke II, p. 450)

(. . . and as long as this new Man
did not exist, one could do nothing

but act friendly and be kind to one another for a while. There wasn't anything more to be made of it. And the best thing would be for women and men to keep their distance, have nothing to do with one another, until both had found their way out of their confusion, and the bewilderment, the friction in all relationships.)

Christa Wolf takes a different view -- as long as the New Man doesn't exist, one must invent him:

Jetzt steht uns mein Experiment bevor: der Versuch zu lieben. Der übrigens auch zu phantastischen Erfindungen führt: zur Erfindung dessen, den man lieben kann. (Wolf, "Selbstversuch," p. 100)

(Now my experiment lies ahead: the attempt to love. Which by the way can also lead to fantastic inventions: the invention of the person one can love.)

It is surely significant that here we are no longer (or not yet?) inventing a man capable of love, but simply one worthy of love.

In conclusion, I would like to mention such an invention -- the construction of the ideal beloved -- in a new, avant-garde text. Elfriede Czurda's prose text Diotima oder die Differenz des Glücks (Diotima or the Difference of Happiness) deals precisely with the collision between the construction of happiness and the deficient reality. Construction of a man here signifies both utopia and its prevention. The absence of the male is inscribed in the text as desire.

Vielleicht ist das mein wirklich grosser Wunsch: Dir immer so fern zu bleiben, dass ich dich nur als vagen Umriss begreife und du, wie heute, mit Eigenschaften ausgestattet bist, die dich zu meinem bevorzugten Lieblingsmann machen 30

(Maybe this is really my greatest wish -- always to be so far away from you that I can comprehend you only as a vague outline, and you are endowed, as today, with characteristics that make you my favorite darling man)

The text is an intellectual and ironic playing with the production and projection of images otherwise carried out by men; here, for once, a woman has self-consciously turned the tables.

Eine Verbindung (Fusion?) von Konstruktions- und Alltagswirklichkeit ist ausgeschlossen: In dieser Konstruktion von Glück stelle ich an dich keine Erwartungen, und deshalb erfüllst du sie alle: In dieser Konstellation lebst du mit mir alle erdenklichen und gewünschten Formen von Liebe, Beziehung, Zusammenleben, du verabscheust mich, du ersehnt mich, du bist männlich, weich und zärtlich, du bist alles, was ich dir in dieser Konstellation zubillige: Und du bist vor allem nichts anderes. (Czurda, p. 30)

(A union [fusion?] of constructed reality and everyday reality is out of the question. In this construction of happiness I have no expectations of you and therefore you meet them all. In this constellation you live all imaginable forms of love, relationship, cohabitation with me; you detest me; you desire me; you are manly, soft and gentle; you are everything that I allow you to be in this constellation. And above all, you are not anything else.)

In Czurda's text, the construction of the masculine becomes a "mise-en-scène" of the feminine (Czurda, p. 80), even when it is strained, even in the intentional "sharpness and inescapability" of its linguistic constructions. Thus, her invention of an ideal man, which might be exemplary in its self-reflection, is successful. She does not force the male into the

"procrustean bed" of an image, but refers back to her own identity: an identity of language and expression.

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NOTES

* This is the revised version of a working paper presented at the conference Feministische Literaturwissenschaft: Zum Verhältnis von Frauenbildern und Frauenliteratur in Hamburg, May 1983, organized by Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel. See the conference proceedings, Feministische Literaturwissenschaft, ed. Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1984). The paper is based on my dissertation "Wie schreiben Frauen über Männer? Untersuchungen zu Konstruktion und Kritik des Männlichen in zeitgenössischer deutschsprachiger Literatur von Frauen." The quotations in the title are from Günter Grass, Der Butt. Roman (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), p. 36 and Ria Endres, Am Ende angekommen. Dargestellt am wahnhaften Dunkel der Männerporträts des Thomas Bernhard (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1980).

1 Claudia Honegger/Bettina Heintz, "Zum Strukturwandel weiblicher Widerstandsformen im 19. Jahrhundert," in Listen der Ohnmacht. Zur Sozialgeschichte weiblicher Widerstandsformen, ed. Honegger and Heintz (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), p. 50.

2 Wolfgang Paulsen, ed. Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin. Neue kritische Ansätze zur deutschen Literatur (Bern/München: Francke, 1979), p. 8.

3 Cf. Inge Stephan, "'Bilder und immer wieder Bilder . . . ' Überlegungen zur Untersuchung von Frauenbildern in männlicher Literatur." In die verborgene Frau. Sechs Beiträge zu einer feministischen Literaturwissenschaft, ed. Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1983), pp. 15-34.

4 Cf. Phyllis Chesler, About Men. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978; also Men by Women, ed. Janet Todd (New York/London: Holmes and Meier, 1981). From

the same year, Liselotte Weingant's dissertation "Das Bild des Mannes im Frauenroman der siebziger Jahre." Diss. University of Illinois. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982; also Annette Bley's master's thesis "Die Darstellung des Mannes in neuerer Literatur von Frauen." Philosophische Fakultät Universität Münster (typescript), 1981.

5 Else Hoppe, ed. Der Typus des Mannes in der Dichtung der Frau. Eine internationale Revue (Hamburg: Marion von Schröder Verlag, 1960), p. 7.

6 Cited from Eleanor Flexner, Mary Wollstonecraft. A Biography (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 1976², p. 233.

7 Barbara Sichtermann, "'Von einem Silbermesser zerteilt.' Über die Schwierigkeiten für Frauen, Objekte zu bilden, und über die Folgen dieser Schwierigkeiten für die Liebe." In Barbara Sichtermann, Weiblichkeit. Zur Politik des Privaten (Berlin: Wagenbach Verlag, 1983), pp. 70-80.

8 Herdis Møllehave, Le und die Knotenmänner. Roman (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), p. 169. (Original: Le. Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 1977).

9 Elisabeth Plessen, Mitteilung an den Adel (Zürich/Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1976). Citations in this study from München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979, p. 221. Translation by Ruth Heiss Such Sad Tidings. New York: Viking Press, 1979.

10 Brigitte Schwaiger, Lange Abwesenheit (Wien/Hamburg: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1980); citations in this study from Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982.

11 Cf. Schwaiger, p. 28. Unfortunately I cannot consider the political dimension of the confrontation with the fathers' generation in depth, because it would go beyond the scope of this study. On this topic, cf. the conference proceedings Deutsche Väter. Über das Vaterbild in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur. Loccum Protokolle 6/1981 (Evangelische Akademie Loccum, 3056 Rehburg-Loccum 2), and also Michael Schneider, "Deutschland, Traum and Trauma," in Michael Schneider, Den Kopf verkehrt aufgesetzt oder die melancholische Linke. Aspekte des Kulturzerfalls in den siebziger Jahren (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchter-

hand Verlag, 1981), pp. 7-140.

12 Barbara Bronnen, Die Tochter. Roman (München: Piper Verlag, 1980). Citations in this study from München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982.

13 Hélène Cixous, Weiblichkeit in der Schrift (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1980), p. 26.

14 Karin Struck, Lieben. Roman (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 1981³, p. 342.

15 Karin Struck, Trennung. Erzählung (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 1982³, p. 24.

16 Karin Struck, Kindheits Ende. Journal einer Krise (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), p. 542.

17 For a detailed discussion of this cf. Regula Venske, "'Oder begehrt man nur die unzureichenden Männer?' Männer-Sucht und Mutter-Suche in Karin Strucks Lieben, Trennung, und Kindheits Ende," in Hans Adler/Hans-Joachim Schrimpf, eds. Karin Struck (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 147-62.

18 Karin Petersen, Das fette Jahr (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1978). Citations in this study from München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, p. 16.

19 Petersen, p. 110. This is also the title of a story of marriage and divorce by Judith Jannberg (ps.), München: Kindler, 1980. Karin Petersen's new book, Ich will nicht mehr von dir, als du mir geben magst. Monate in Poona und Oregon (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, May 1983) confirms one's worst fears: inability to differentiate, excessive elevation of a father figure, pleasure in suffering, etc. Concerning feminist awareness -- which is to be expected from a former editor of the feminist journal Courage -- Petersen is far behind Verena Stefan's Häutungen (1975), e.g. in her understanding of her alienated, male-defined sexuality. Apparently one must travel to India and join a religious sect in order to arrive at discoveries like these. Even the programmatic title Ich will nicht mehr von dir als du mir geben magst is ambivalent: besides the appropriate realization that one must be responsible for oneself and not project childish-symbiotic desires onto others, it also contains a major retraction of longings and utopias. For feminists, who want more (and rightly so), it is a slap in the face. This title and the program behind it

are harmonistic and unbelievable, representing a form of self-censorship that reduces wishes and expectations rather than carrying them out.

20 Svende Merian, Der Tod des Märchenprinzen. Frauenroman. (Hamburg: Buntbuchverlag, 1980); citations in this study from Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983.

21 Svende Merian's book became a kind of cult book among leftist and "alternative" circles after its publication in 1980. Three years later the alleged response by the character Arne of Merian's book, Ich war der Märchenprinz, published under the pseudonym Arne Piewitz (Hamburg: Buntbuch Verlag, 1983), was circulating among the same groups. The fact that this satire of the book was, to some extent, approvingly reviewed as hostile to women, illustrates the boomerang effect of the text once again.

22 On the definition of certain texts by women as epigonic -- i.e., texts which merely present "a historically defined, but already out-of-date perspective within the women's movement," and take up a "successful model of women's literary text without varying the content," cf. Evelyn Keitel, "Die gesellschaftlichen Funktionen feministischer Textproduktion," in Claudia Opitz, ed., Weiblichkeit oder Feminismus? Beiträge zur interdisziplinären Frauentagung Konstanz 1983 (Weingarten: Drumlín Verlag, 1984), pp. 239-54; here p. 246.

23 Christa Wolf, "Selbstversuch. Traktat zu einem Protokoll," in Sarah Kirsch/Irmtraud Morgner/Christa Wolf, Geschlechtertausch. Drei Geschichten über die Umwandlung der Verhältnisse (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand Verlag, 1980), pp. 65-100.

24 Geno Hartlaub, Die Tauben von San Marco. Roman (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1953), p. 106.

25 Hilde Domin, Das zweite Paradies (München: Piper, 1968); citations in this study from the new and revised edition, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, 1981².

26 Cf. Cixous' interpretation of a Rilke-sonnet, op cit., pp. 58ff.; p. 63.

27 Ingeborg Bachmann, Werke, ed. Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster, Vol. II (München/Zürich: R. Piper Verlag, 1978), 1982²,

pp. 103 and 104.

28 Cf. in this regard Ingeborg Bachmann, Malina, in Werke, op cit., Vol. III, p. 269.

29 Christa Reinig, Entmannung. Die Geschichte Ottos und seiner vier Frauen (Düsseldorf: Eremiten Presse, 1976). Citations in this study from Darmstadt and Neuwied: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1977, 1981⁵, p. 48.

30 Elfriede Czurda, Diotima oder die Differenz des Glücks. Prosa (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), p. 42.