NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES TO WOMEN AND DEATH,

AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE WORK OF GUSTAV KLIMT

by

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INTRODUCTION:

Increasingly, as people have become aware of the stark threat that mankind with its science and technology has become both to the continued survival of the human race and the ecology of this planet, studies have been done equating the oppression and usage of women with the abuse and exploitation of the earth's resources. (27, p. 117). According to the behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner, (24, p. 11), there have been no comparable advances in the study of human behaviour to balance our huge advances in the sciences. While we build weapons of mass destruction and poison the environment with our industries, the human race remains just as volatile, insecure and apprehensive as it ever was. Although the parallel between the abuse of women and the earth may at first seem an unlikely comparison from which to draw conclusions, history and anthropology have shown that, with very few exceptions, the male psyche has associated femaleness and its ability to give birth with the earth and maleness with transcendence and the sky.

The first chapter will explore the historical evidence that illustrates the gradual change over from matriarchy to patriarchy, and the repercussions which led to the association of women with death in the male psyche.

Our twentieth century capitalists societies have their roots deeply set in the end of the last century which witnessed very stressful upheavals in the cultural, economic, political, social and scientific arenas. The second chapter will explore this transitional period between Imperialism and Capitalism in which the image of the femme fatale in all her forms became notably prominent and popular.

The third chapter will take a look at the work of the nineteenth century Symbolist artist Gustav Klimt, who was obsessed with the female form, and often juxtaposed it with death.

Through history and pre-history, over and above the rites of hunting, fishing, protection and fertility, one spectre has haunted mankind. That spectre is Death. In a hostile world pre-historic man had to struggle to survive against storms, floods, drought, disease, plagues, famine, wild animals and other men.

Survival against the power of nature and the terror of death was a matter of two basic things; food and fertility. According to C.G. Jung,

> because children, animals and primitive minds locate blame outside themselves for things they cannot control, their troubles seem to be inflicted by some invisible external creature.

In this way Palaeolithic men personified the forces of nature, making them more tangible and thus more controllable.

> Similarities in imagery portraying universal longings, terrors, emotions and difficulties emerge again and again in basic religions and secular tales, irrespective of continent or century, and discernible despite the variations in language and customs. (10).

Jung's explanation for this phenomenon was what he called the collective unconscious which houses 'not only all truly beautiful and great thoughts, but also every deed of abomination ever perpetuated'.

The language of this unconscious is also the language of dreams which are in turn the great source of all mankind's stories and myths. Although dreams are said to express mankind's deepest instinctual fears and desires, it is only in the most extreme form of dream, the nightmare, that we will find clear expression of the most basic fears. The distinguishing feature of the nightmare is the victims experience of terror caused by their fear of destruction by some terrible being or event. Even the word 'nightmare' can be traced back to the Anglo Saxon word for incubus/succubus or goblin, which is mare. This in turn is derived from the Sanskrit 'mara', which means crusher.

Most creation myths, with few exceptions, portray the natural forces and the earth as 'mother earth', and the sky as 'father sky'. The connection is significant in that it shows that from a very early time, men associated women and their ability to create life and sustain it, with the earth that gave both them and their animals life and sustenance. Women were seen to be closer to natures mysterious secrets.

> The mother has from the outset a decidedly symbolic significance for a man, which probably accounts for his strong tendency to idealize her. Idealization is a hidden apotropaism; one idealizes whenever there is a secret fear to be exorcised. What is feared is the unconscious and its magical influence. (9, p. 40)

Some of the earliest attempts of man to sway the 'invisible forces' of nature to his advantage can be found in the many small naked female figures that have been found

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The Mother Goddess

Fig. 1:   Examples of the Palaeolithic Mother-Goddess.
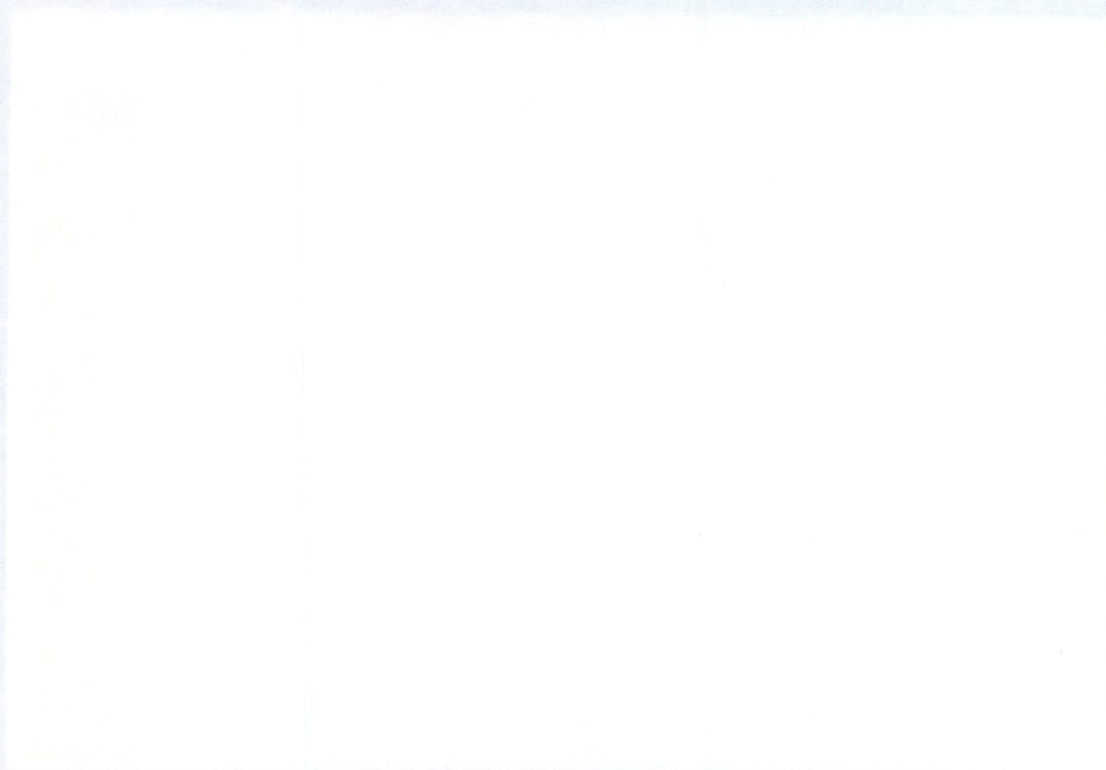
from around the late Palaeolithic period. From their swollen breasts and exaggerated bellies, and the decisive lack of attention paid to any personal or facial features, it is thought that these figures were intended to exert some kind of magical influence on human fertility. But if 'mother earth' was responsible for giving life, then she was also responsible for taking it away, and as a rule the personifications of the 'Great Mother' combined both the gentle and generous with the destructive and horrific qualities of nature. She was a goddess who had ultimate power over fertility and sterility, which meant life and death. Her

> icons and imagery may be of the order of Venus de
> Milo, an idealized form of female beauty; or
> equally, they may suggest a mind diseased - skinny
> skull-festooned hags, their fangs dripping with
> the blood of generations of men. (26, p. 32).

Mother goddesses with these characteristics have been worshipped from Scandinavia to Melanesia under many different names. Inanna of Sumeria, Ishtar of Babylon, Astarte or Anat of Canaan, Asherah of Phoenicia and Aphrodite of Greece were only some of her manifestations.

Nightmares were often regarded as female spirits. The nightmare was believed to be a supernatural being who crouched upon and tried to have sexual relations with its mortal victims. Female spirits often came to plague and tempt men especially holy or celibate ones, and whether their countenance was bewitchingly beautiful or monstrously

ghastly, the victim had no control and was helplessly and irresistibly drawn to them.

These images along with the images of the negative aspects of the mother goddess betray a deep tendency in the human psyche to link women and sex with chaos and disorder which in turn was ultimately a death threat, for without some kind of order and control, men could neither manipulate their environment nor survive. If men did not control nature it would envelope and devour them and because of this women were always treated with a certain degree of awe, suspicion and fear, and as the human embodiment of nature, had to be suppressed.

Death is a universal experience. All living things must at some time die and there are as many myths about death as there are about the beginning of the world. Almost universally however, man is believed to have been intended for immortality like the snakes, the crabs and the moon. Death is an intruder and it is interesting to note the number of myths, despite cultural or historical ties, in which death is alleged to have come into the world as a result of the foolish, malicious or disobedient act of a woman.

There is a Polynesian myth about a woman whose son could not recognize her after she shed her old skin. All people in those days renewed their lives by shedding their skins. The

woman took pity on her son, put back on her old skin and soon afterwards died. From that day on all mankind died.

The aborigines of New South Wales believed that God had forbidden mankind to go near a certain hollow tree that had bees living in. The men listened but the women wanted the honey and one day a woman hit the tree with an axe. Death flew out of the tree and from that day on people died.

The Blackfoot indians of North America have a myth in which the first man and the first woman decide to throw a piece of buffalo bone in the water, and if it floated then mankind would be immortal and if it sank then men would die. The man wanted immortality, but the woman wanted mortality because she thought that there would be too many people in the world if people didn't die, and people would not be able to feel sorry for one another. But when they threw the bone in the water it sank because the woman who had magical powers turned it into stone.

Another example of this kind of myth is one from Uganda in which one of the daughters of heaven is married to the first man, Kintu, who has proved himself worthy of her. They are given many gifts including a hen and sent to live on earth. They are told to hurry and not to come back in case they meet the bride's brother Death. The bride forgets the hen food and goes back for it. God, in his annoyance, grants

Death his wish to accompany the newly weds back to earth.
(26, pp. 41-44).

Thanks to the bible, Christian Europe also pointed its accusing finger back to the beginning of the world and to the first woman, Eve, who had eaten God's forbidden fruit and brought death into the world.

According to the Bible, God said to man (Genesis 3.17)

Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat ... accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering shall you get food from it every day of your life. It shall yield you brambles and thistles and you shall eat wild plants. With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread, until you return to the soil, as you are taken from it. For dust you are and to dust you shall return.

As patriarchal societies evolved and spread from the Middle East, there was a shift of power from earth to sky, eventually culminating in the singular and ultimate god of the Jews, Yahweh, and then the Christian 'Heavenly Father'. So deep was the ancient tradition of misogyny in the Middle East and the West however that rather than being engulfed by the teachings of love in Christianity, the traditional attitudes to female sexuality and death infiltrated and distorted Christian doctrine to suit itself. Thus the myth of the Fall became a reinforcement to the puritanical flesh hating Gnostic, and misogynist classical beliefs that women were inferior and deadly and that men had a god-given right and superiority over them. Gregory of Nyssa (died 395), a famous church theologian, believed that 'Had the Fall not

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happened, Adam and Eve would have multiplied in an angelic fashion, without recourse to marriage and sexual reproduction.' (18, p. 41). But with foresight God had equipped both men and women with sexual organs so that with them man could 'combat death' on earth after he had been banished from the Garden of Eden. Sexuality was therefore not considered to be a natural part of the original human state but an evil misfortune endowed on man as a punishment for listening to Eve.

It was on these grounds that men justified their cruelty to and subordination of women. Women had to be watched, suppressed and controlled because no matter how virtuous a woman seemed the fact still remained that she was a daughter of Eve and hence inherited the responsibility for bringing death into the world and possessed a basically evil nature. In a man's world her rightful place lay at a man's side not as his equal but as his property. She was his wife, his daughter , his begetter of sons and weaker half.

> Praise to the Highest , who has till now well preserved the male gender ... Having desired to be born and to suffer for us in that gender, he has also on that account, granted it preference. (18, p. 220).

At this point one might well wonder what had become of the Great Mother. The once rounded archetype of the Mother Goddess with her control over life and death eventually became overcome by patriarchy. However her psychic significance was too powerful for her to disappear and so she

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evolved.   In Christianity and more specifically Roman Catholicism, the same qualities were present in its examples of the feminine that once existed in the Great Earth Mother. However her extremes were divided into the negative and positive attributes of women as men saw them in a patriarchal world.

Both roles remained inextricably linked to death, one as a giver of life and protector against death, the other as the wicked, lusty and man-eating femme fatale who sought destruction and death for men and mankind.

The Virgin Mary entered art in early Medieval Europe as the Queen of Heaven. She was a 'hieratic figure of majestic impersonality', who held 'her son in her arms as though he were an appendage'. (26, p. 154). By the fourteen-hundreds the regal Queen of Heaven had dissolved into the Mother of God. She was transformed from being an aloof authoritarian Queen into a model mother, a picture of pure virtue, a being who was innocent and yet wise. We can see this by juxtaposing two portraits, one by Donatello and the other by Cimabue - see Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 - Donatello and Cimabue - Virgin and Child.

It was the Virgin Mary who retained all the motherly and loving aspects that had once been part of the rounded archetypal Mother Goddess. The Mother of God was a life giving being who protected and understood those who asked for her blessing. She sustained and nurtured the life of her son to save us all from death. Unlike the rest of womankind, she had not Eve's guilt for bringing death down on Mankind, she was free of Original Sin. Christianity had diffused the powerful archetypes of Mother and Child to do its own bidding in two ways. Firstly, although she was supreme Queen of Heaven, Mary was always subordinate and completely obedient to the Heavenly Father and to her son, the son of God. She suffered willingly and without question as God required. Secondly, she was set on high above and beyond all women because she was an angelic virgin who had had a son. St. Jerome held that 'Mary had furnished both sexes with enough grounds for preserving their virginity and that the moral superiority of the virginal state was manifest in her person'. (18, p. 49).

Through distorting and manipulating the original teachings of the Church Mary became what men wanted her to be, for 'it was not that people prized virginity because Mary had been a virgin, but that they transformed Mary into a perpetual virgin because they prized virginity'. (18, p. 49). Having removed any notion of threatening sexuality from her, Mary became the Perfect mother that men had always longed for. Indeed, 'so heady did the Marian cult grow by

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the Church's historic antipathy to woman could not stem the tide of worship.' (16, p. 154)

She became the tragic heroine who loved and cradled man in death as she had done in life. She would always be there. She was, more often than not , represented as a beautiful young and virtuous woman who radiated a warmth and a light that comforted and guided mankind.

> Because she was an Earth Mother and more particularly because she is the Mother of God, she exerts a natural authority, and because that authority is not a sexual one it offers no threat. Man can submit to it, be comforted by it, feel safe. (16, p. 165).

Having taken all its favourite pickings to reconstruct his ideal woman with whom he could feel safe in the knowledge that she promised to defeat death with her son, the Church then condemned all of what was left. All power-threatening or sexual characteristics of the female were written off as evil and dangerous. A sexual woman was a bad woman for corruption of the flesh was equated with corruption of the spirit. The most outrageous and extreme case of this misogynistic fear of female sexuality occurred around the same time the Marian cult and also the teachings of the old ascetic church fathers were at their strongest. Women were a necessary evil in order to combat death with procreation. For virginity went hand in hand with immortality, but man had been punished with marriage and death. Church dogma dictated that sexual intercourse should only occur between man and

wife as a means to procreation. The only good the ascetic St. Jerome could see in marriage was that it 'brings forth virgins'. He also had the wisdom not to 'deny that holy women are to be found among wives, but only when they have ceased to be spouse and when they themselves imitate virginal chastity'. (18, p. 50).

In 1484 Pope Innocent 8th embarked upon one of the most horrific punishments cast on women by men for the deadly threat their sexuality posed to the fragile sexuality of men. It culminated in the Malleus Maleficarum written by two German Dominicans who were deeply influenced by the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The source of the Malleus Maleficarum is that of man's deep seated and ancient fear of women and reeks of man's fear and jealousy of her life and death power.

> In the background ... rises a spectre which more than any creation of man's imagination has identified the male horror of woman's sexuality let loose- and that spectre is the witch. (16, p. 73).

According to Thomas Aquinas demons and witches were of consequence, for not only could they harm people but they often caused sterility and inhibited sexual intercourse. In the High Middle Ages people knew of at least fifty ways in which demons and witches could inhibit the conjugal act. Not only could they cause 'active enfeeblement of the member that serves to fertilize' but they also 'conjured away male members'. (18, p. 205).

Perhaps this fear of castration by the sexual female harks back to some of the ancient cults of Mother worship, in which, as in the case of the Syrian cult of Cybele and Attis, which spread as far as Rome, priests were eunuchs who wore feminine attire and makeup.

As well as castration and causing sterility in men, the worst kind of witch, the midwife witch, was also alleged to have killed unbaptized children, 'for the Devil knows that such children are precluded from the Kingdom of Heaven by the penalty of damnation or original sin'. (18, p. 205).

The Malleus Maleficarum came to the conclusion that there were far more female witches than male ones on account of the fuel which the Catholic church's superabundance of theological denigrators of women provided. Women were unreliable and inconsistent because of their greater water content. They were naturally more prone to the sin of lust. They were 'a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable misfortune, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, a deficiency of nature, painted in handsome colours'. (18, p. 208).

As women were mendacious by nature so were they by speech. Everything about the sexual woman from her beauty right down to her ability to cry was to be suspected. If a woman cried then she had some evil plot in mind and if she didn't she was a witch. The world, i.e. man , would be

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spared 'countless perils', if 'woman's iniquities' did not exist. (18, p. 210). For according to the inquisitors Sprenger and Institoris, 'if we seek, we find that almost all the kingdoms of the earth have been destroyed by women, the first of them, which was a fortunate kingdom, being Troy'. (18, p. 210).

In order to avoid all the evil that enveloped the world and threatened man, one had to aspire to the virginal state as much as possible, pray often and have sexual intercourse 'in fear of the Lord, more for posterity than for lust'. (18, p. 202).

Medieval art very graphically mirrored the beliefs of its time. Alongside the many portraits of the Virgin and her Son, hundreds of depictions of hell and the Last Judgement which took great delight in sadistically showing what became of damned and unholy souls, with particular emphasis on the punishment for lust, co-existed. In Giotto's Last Judgement in Padua, there hang two damned souls, a male and a female who are suspended by their sexual organs, while a third sinner is being castrated with a pair of pincers by a devil. (See Fig. 3).

> Far from longing to be unrestrained in his (man's) love of woman, he fears that he will be punished for it, even destroyed by it. It is love as a disaster not as bliss that has most deeply caught the artistic imagination. (16, p. 138).
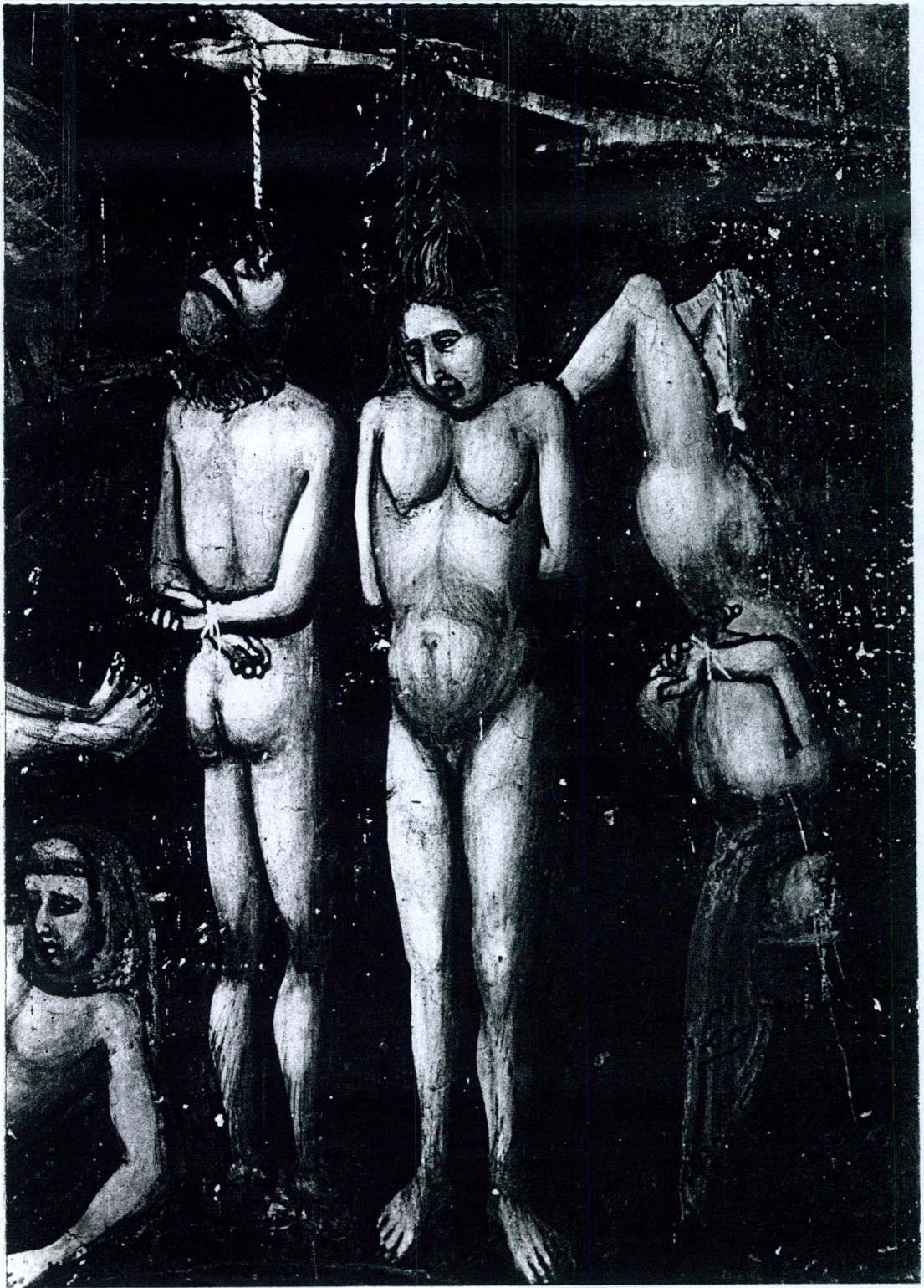
Fig. 3 - Detail of Hell from Giotto's <u>Last Judgement</u>, 1310.

History, myth, religion, literature and painting, all of which for at least the last two thousand years have been dominated by male opinions and beliefs, betray a deep tendency in men to blame and punish women for the difficulties they (men) have experienced as their transient lives tried to conquer the natural world. All life's uncertainties in an unpredictable world had to be given meaning in the certainty of death, which in the end always triumphs.

> .. he scythes through the ranks of the proud, creeps upon the unwary with his bow and arrow, and frightens all and sundry. His lack of respect for social degree and his indiscriminate behaviour are especially terrifying. He grins, allows near escapes, but always conquers. (13).

CHAPTER 2

By the end of the Nineteenth century, the world had become a very unpredictable place indeed. Through Europe there was mass emigration both from the countryside to the cities and from mainland Europe to foreign colonies. Between 1850 and 1900 alone, more than sixty million Europeans left their native lands to find their 'place in the sun'. And 'only one out of seven people born in rural areas now remained there. Of the six who left, one emigrated and five settled in towns'. (3, p. 23).

This hitherto unprecedented upheaval of European societies was caused by the huge discoveries and advances made in science and technology. The developments made in agricultural machinery led to a reduction in the numbers of people needed to work the land, while the railways provided the easy transportation of the manpower needed to work the huge new industries. Towns sprang up literally over night. Once quaint villages became towns, towns became cities and in no time at all, living conditions for the working classes became squalid and overcrowded. Exploitation, disease and poverty were the sacrifices to be demanded by the emerging faceless new world order as it improperly applied the biological discoveries of Charles Darwin to its workforce and declared 'Survival of the fittest'. For 'money obeyed no other law than that of profit, which seemed reasonable enough

as long as one ignored the price paid by human suffering'. (3, p. 24).

As Imperialism began to crumble away, so too did its values and morals become obsolete. The social and moral fabric of Europe was collapsing on all sides. Nietzsche declared that God was dead. People suddenly found themselves in an alien and isolated world, disconnected from the past and from the future for which their lives had been prepared. Old answers were meaningless in the face of a new age and the general atmosphere was one of deep insecurity. Chaos yawned in the face of mankind for such profound changes did not occur without serious pain and conflict.

> The obvious harshness of the age, which pushed some (such as the working people crowded together in the cities) to contemplate the eventuality of revolutionary change, incited others to turn back towards a timeless and already unreal past. (7, p. 9).

Such people as Karl Marx, Zola, Dickens and Hysmans sought to expose the gross injustices of the time and bring the idea of reform to the oppressed masses. Others deeply opposed to industrialization and its implications, (Ludwig II, Ruskin, Wagner), looked back through rose coloured spectacles to the Imperial past and to what seemed in comparison to the convulsive barbarity of industrialization, an idyllic existence. But at the same time rational science was heatedly struggling with obscurantism, it was also, thanks to the perceptive and accurate observations of Sigmund Freud, acknowledging the irrational powers of the

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unconscious. Freud was acutely aware of the hypocrisy, repression and neurosis of his age and possessed the ability to describe vividly the psychological phenomena that he saw all around him. However, despite all he could do to relieve the neurosis of men he received the impression 'over and over again in analytical work, that not even psychoanalysis can do much for women because of their inherent deficiency of femininity'. (6, p. 116).

In a time when Europe was in upheaval, witnessing the 'adopting of liberal political structures', the 'creation of constitutional regimes', and the extension of the vote to 'all men without restriction', (3, p. 23), any thoughts of female emancipation for example as described by John Stuart who found 'suppression of women an analogy to that of Negroes', (6, p. 110), were being impatiently dismissed because

> all reforming action in law and education would
> break down in front of the fact that long before
> the age at which a man can earn position in
> society, Nature has determined woman's destiny
> through beauty, charm and sweetness. Law and
> custom have much to give woman that has been
> withheld from them, but the position of women will
> surely be what it is: in youth an adored darling
> and in mature years a loved wife. (6, p. 110).

Although witch-hunting had stopped by the nineteenth century, misogyny had not. Indeed in an age full of change and turmoil the male psyche remained as ever devoted to its two extreme archetypal females: the femme fatale and the passive mother. But instead of tolerating one and burning

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the other he feared, suppressed and wanted both. As Freud observed

> psychical impotence is ... not restricted to
> failure to perform the act of coitus in
> circumstances where a desire to obtain pleasure is
> present and the genital apparatus is intact, we
> may in the first place add all those men ... who
> never fail in the act but who carry it out without
> getting any particular pleasure from it ... the
> man almost always feels his respect for the woman
> acting as a restriction on his sexual activity ...
> This is the source of his need for a debased
> sexual object, a woman who is ethically inferior,
> to whom he need attribute no aesthetic scruples
> ... It is to such a woman that he prefers to
> devote his sexual potency, even when the whole of
> his affection belongs to a woman of a higher kind.
> (19, p. 254).

From his reading of anthropological studies of primitive men, Freud noted that 'wherever primitive man has set up a taboo he fears some danger', (19, p. 271). Dread of women he saw clearly expressed in primitive man's rules of avoidance of her.

> Perhaps this dread is based on the fact that woman
> is different from man, forever incomprehensible
> and mysterious, strange and therefore apparently
> hostile. The man is afraid of being weakened by
> woman, infected with her femininity and of then
> showing himself incapable. (19, p. 172).

He continues by remarking that 'In all this there is nothing obsolete, nothing which is not still alive among ourselves'.   (19, p. 172).   Indeed nineteenth century European men had inherited from tradition female sexuality enshrined in taboo, and in such turbulent times it was not the image of perfect maternity that was to haunt their dreams so much as the sexual and life-threatening femme fatale. Despite high victorian morals European men found themselves

drawn irresistibly to sexual women and like the medieval succubi, both courted and shunned them.

According to Robert L. Delevoy, Ernst Cassier showed 'quite clearly how the products of art, like those of knowledge, law, language and technology, are indissolubly linked to the origin of myth'. Symbols are considered the 'primal nuclei of myth, religion, language and art' (3, p. 185), and it was these chaotic symbols that Freud's psychoanalysis sought to uncover. For this Freud was accused of letting his 'artistic imagination' get 'the better of his thought as a scientific researcher'. (3, p. 179). However in other spheres of life Freud was far from alone in his exploration of myth and symbolism. Throughout Europe a wave of what we have come to know as Symbolist painters, writers, musicians, architects and philosophers, was sweeping. They sought to 'establish a codified discourse based on what has come to be called our phylogenic heritage:the distant past, archaic language, myths of origin'. (3, p. 183). But of all these it was the discourse between the symbolist painters and writers that most clearly expressed and reiterated the themes of the time. One of the most outstanding themes was that of Eros and Thanatos, love and death, and in a male context: women and death.

Innumerable femmes fatales were portrayed by the Symbolists, lurking, tempting, luring men with their femininity, their man trap. Mythological sphinxes, sirens,

female vampires, Salome and every kind of male-horrifying, death-threatening female form became prominent around this period. Even heroines like Judith and victims like Danae were transformed into lusty seductresses. Such transformations are not surprising given the attitudes to female sexuality that prevailed at the time. Woman having been deprived of such basic rights as education and having had her sexual function elected as her sole purpose in life, in such books as Sex and Character (Geschlecht und Charakter) by Otto Weininger, people were then recommended to

> regard women in terms of two types, bearing within themselves sometimes more of the one and sometimes more of the other: these are the mother and the whore ... The one will take any man who can help her produce a child, and as soon as she has her child, she does not need another man. This is her only claim to the label 'monogamous'. The other woman gives herself to any man who helps her get erotic pleasure: for her this is an end in itself. This is where the two extremes meet and we hope this will enable us to gain some insight into the essence of womanhood as such. (5, p. 130).

Freud too believed that one way or the other the only thing in life a woman really wanted was a male penis. He based his theory of penis envy on the presumption that subconsciously women saw themselves as deformed men and thus harboured a deep and potentially dangerous jealousy of men. Freud put forward in his theory of penis envy that it caused woman to 'feel as much depreciated in her own eyes' as in the eyes of the boy and later perhaps of the man, 'and leads in normal femininity, to the wish for the penis of her husband, a wish that is never really fulfilled until she possesses a penis through giving birth to a son'. (6, p. 114).

In the uncertain face of life's transience, men tried to understand and explain birth, life, love and death, and because women were believed to be biologically and intellectually inferior, men did all of this on their own terms. Thus women were defined in male terms and to sexually repressed Victorian society with its rather overblown ideas as to the importance of the male genital organ and sexuality, and in the light of such ideas as penis envy, any desirable sexual woman must indeed have seemed threatening. Any woman who went to Freud and challenged her role in society was promptly but sincerely dealt with. For

> The desire after all to obtain the penis for which she so much longs may even contribute to the motives that impel grown-up woman to come to analysis, and what she quite reasonably expects to get from analysis, such as the capacity to pursue an intellectual career, can often be recognized as a sublimated modification of this repressed wish.
> (6, p. 115).

This psychological tendency to repress women did not stem so much from a sinister conscious decision, but rather from a deeply unconscious need, and if the female desire for fulfillment and equality with men was interpreted as the desire to possess a penis, then the threat of women achieving independent power must have been equivalent to the threat of male castration and death.

> Alas! the poison and the sword held me up to scorn and said, 'You do not deserve to be released from your accursed thraldom, you fool - even if our efforts delivered you from her sway, your kiss would resuscitate the corpse of your vampire'.
> (3, p. 135 - quoted from Charles Baudelaire, <u>Les Fleurs du Mal</u>, 1876).

Fig. 4 - <u>The Vampire</u> by Edward Munch.

According to Edwin Mullins (16, p. 79),

In painting the urge to punish women for their dangerous sexuality is usually masked ... fear and hatred of women often masquerade as appreciation, even as love, certainly as desire.

But in the painting 'The Vampire' (Fig. 4) by the Norwegian Symbolist painter Edward Munch, this is not so. This painting is of a man who might almost be seen to be receiving comfort while buried in a woman's arms, but in the bluey darkness that envelopes the couple a strange glow radiates from the woman's half hidden face. This painting is a blatant depiction of the male fear of the femme fatale, not in her usual guise seductively displaying her female nudity, but at the critical moment when she strikes, the point when her fangs sink deep into male flesh and draw out his blood.

Munch also depicted the other extreme of woman as described in Otto Weininger's book, Sex and Character (5, p. 130). In his dry point engraving (1896) he shows the head and torso of a woman who is in oblivious ecstacy. Lines radiate from her towards the outer edges of the central rectangle in which she is enclosed, while strange fetal forms and lines suggestive of wriggling sperm occupy the borders of the print (Fig. 5). In Munch's first solo exhibition in Paris in 1896, the writer Strindberg contributed a few brief analyses of the various works to the Revue Blanche (p. 99), one of which was

Conception : Immaculate or otherwise, it comes to the same thing;the red or golden halo crowns the

Fig. 5 - <u>Madonna</u> by Edward Munch, 1896.

performance of the act, sole raison d'etre of this creature who has no independent existence.

Salome was another favorite femme fatale often portrayed by the Symbolist painters and writers. Her story of eroticism and corruption captured the minds of such people as Gustav Moreau, Franz Von Stuck, Jonis-Karl Huysmans, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsly, to name but a few. Unlike the Vampire, Salome does not kill anyone directly herself, but instead cunningly uses her beauty and sexuality to trick Herod into killing John the Baptist. For her vanity she causes the destruction of two men. John the Baptist is beheaded because he will not give in to her lusty desires; while Herod is manipulated by her erotic dancing into doing her will and is thus doomed for beheading a prophet of God. In the oil painting, Salome (1906) by the Austrian painter Franz Von Stuck (1863-1928), a woman dances charmingly in the foreground against a backdrop of stars. (See Fig. 6). With her head thrown back and her right arm weaving gracefully through the air, while her left arm rests on her hip, her rounded breasts and the soft erotic flesh of her half naked body catch the light. Her fingers, neck, arms and hair sparkle with jewels as her body writhes up out of a spray of translucent skirt. In the background to her right a hideous black slave holds the glowing severed head of John the Baptist on a golden platter. Despite the fact that this is a painting about a lusty and evil seductress, a woman who brings death down on men, there is nothing about her features that betray the black soul and wicked intentions of this

Fig. 6 - <u>Salome</u> by Franz von Stuck, 1906.

woman. As she dances prominently before us, frozen as she is in an inviting and provocative pose, she remains a sexual, beautiful and desirable woman. Only the small dimly glowing decapitated head of John the Baptist hovers in the background like the small government warning on cigarette boxes, to remind us that this is a woman whose sexuality can kill.

Another more openly perverse embodiment of female sexuality to be found in Symbolist art is that of the man-eating Sphinx. With the head and breasts of a woman, and the body of a leopard this mutant creature devoured any man who passed its way and failed to solve its riddle. In Ferdinand Khnopff's painting, (1896) The Caresses (otherwise known as The Sphinx), he depicts Oedipus, who solved the riddle of the sphinx, looking bravely and defiantly out at us, as a hybrid creature with the head of a woman and the body of a leopard embraces him affectionately. (See Fig. 7). Having conquered the deadly man-eating sphinx, he receives its caresses almost dutifully and his pose and expression suggest that he has other important things to attend to and that he will soon be moving on. Considering the fact that in Greek myth the Sphinx was supposed to have been so enraged with Oedipus for solving its riddle that it hurled itself over a cliff, it is interesting to note the Nineteenth century adaptations in so far as they very definitely betray the prevailing male fear and apprehension of female sexuality. Here is a woman, unlike Munch's Vampire or Von Stuck's Salome in that her carnality and natural cunning have become manifest on the

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Fig. 7 - The Sphinx by Ferdinand Khnopff, 1896.

outside in the form of her actual body. Unlike Salome she is no longer a dangerous creature just on the inside, her leopards body with its quick and deadly claws and her beautiful face is an attempt to externalize what Nineteenth century men thought dangerous sexual women looked like on the inside, cunning and fearful beasts to be yoked and conquered. This painting is not just about Oedipus and the Sphinx, it is a painting about men's attitude to women as a strange and alien creature. Man

> .. is accustomed to project his own internal impulses of hostility on to the external world, to ascribe them, that is, to the objects which he feels to be disagreeable or even merely strange. In this way women are regarded as being a source of such dangers ... (19, p. 273).

Beside the more subtle myth-veiled depictions of death-threatening woman in Symbolist art, exist works in which women and death are openly and directly juxtaposed. Edward Munch's 'Death and the Maiden', Alfred Kubin's 'The Bride of Death' and Paul Gauguin's 'Madame le Mort' are some such works. Odilon Redon's illustration for The Temptation of Saint Anthony portrays Death saying, 'I am the one who will make a serious woman of you; come let us embrace'. (3, p. 117).

In Edward Munch's 'Death and the Maiden' (Fig. 8), a fleshy naked woman with her arms around death's neck kisses his skeletal head as he embraces her. Again his face, with the exception of one hollow eye socket, is hidden from our view. These two central figures are surrounded by a
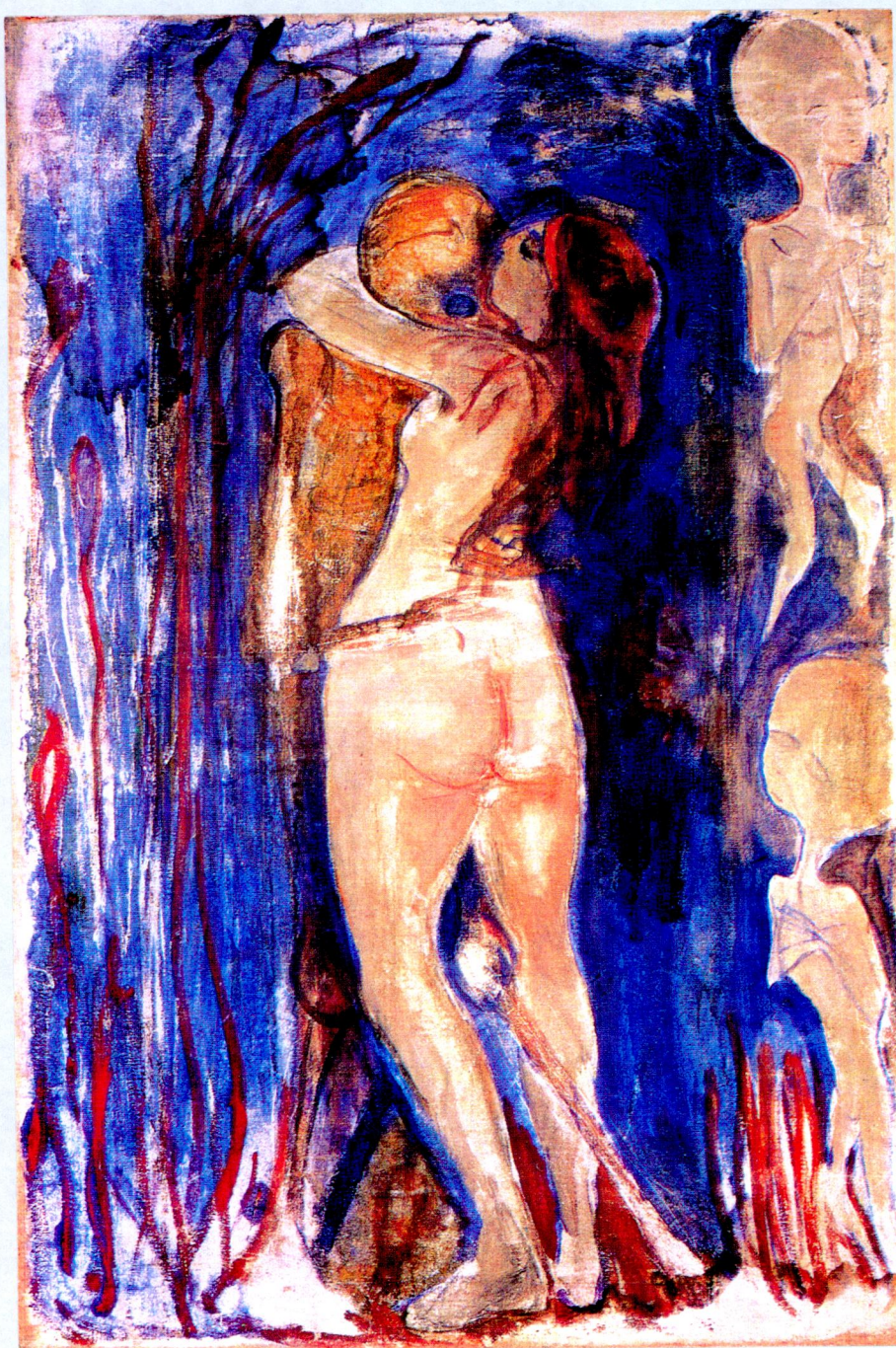
Fig. 8 - <u>Death and the Maiden</u> by Edward Munch, 1893.

background of coarsely applied blues and reds, with some of the red streaks suggestive of veins, while at the right hand edge of the picture, two distorted flesh-coloured foetus-like creatures are suspended.

In Alfred Kubin's '<u>Bride of Death</u>' (Fig. 9), an ugly, thin and rather demonic figure of a woman in a wedding dress stands erect on top of three steps forming a grave, holding a smoking candle that has just been extinguished. Her right hand reaches across her body to manage her long trailing veil and her pose is such that one gets the impression that at any moment she will turn triumphantly and go. A long sliver of a tomb stone rises beside her on the left and the atmosphere is grim and uncertain.

> Only bad women were supposed to enjoy sex: good women closed their eyes and thought of the Empire. Good men venerated good women as goddesses and guardian angles: bad men went a-whoring. But of course they were the same men. (16,p. 79).

On the flip side of the coin to the femmes fatales that haunted the Nineteenth century male European mind and brought such images of wicked and delicious seductresses, was the Victorian image of the good and dutiful mother, the being whose sole purpose in life was to have sons and tend to the needs of her husband. These images too are found in Symbolist art, but often with a touch of melancholy.

Fig. 9 - <u>The Bride of Death</u> by Alfred Kubin.

In Eugene Carriere's painting 'The Sick Child' (1885)
(7, p. 49), we see the tender image of a woman, a mother with
her arms curled lovingly around her sick child (Fig. 10).
Her hands hold the child gently as it (for the gender is
unclear), reaches out for her comfort, and her head is
lowered to kiss the child's forehead, although the half light
obscures the details of her face. The warm brown tones and
chiaroscuroed light give the painting an atmosphere of deep
tenderness. It is an idyllic image of the love between a
mother and her child and yet there is a note of sadness about
it. Perhaps it harks back to the many tender images of the
Virgin and Child, but this woman has no halo, she is a simple
everyday saint, a mother doing what comes most naturally to
her, a woman loving her child.
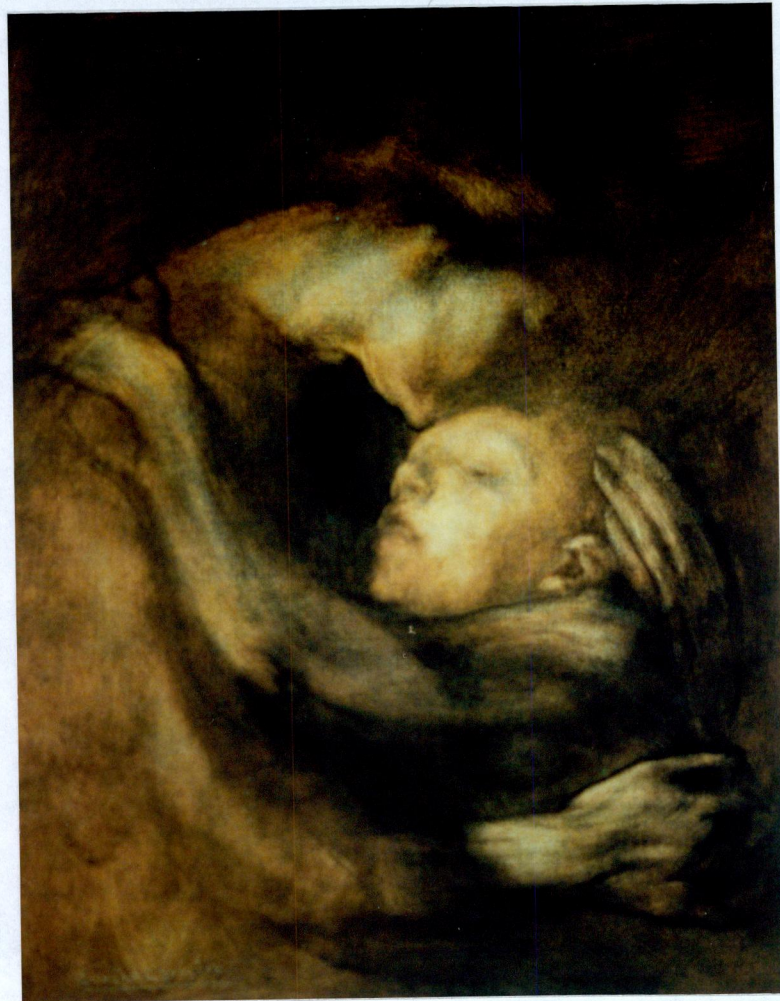
Fig. 10 - <u>The Sick Child</u> by Eugene Carriere, 1885.

CHAPTER 3:

KLIMT: WOMEN AND DEATH

Of all the European artists that lived and worked at the end of the nineteenth century, the Austrian Symbolist painter Gustav Klimt is considered to have painted some of the most beautiful and sensuous images of women ever depicted in the history of art. According to Gottfried Fliedl, 'Klimt saw the world in female form' (5, p. 200), and woven into his work can be found an abundance of nineteenth century male attitudes to women, and indeed to women and death. With the exception of his landscape paintings in which there are never any people, woman and as often as not the female nude, dominates his work. Women generally convey the artist's message in everything from his humanity paintings and allegories, to his portraits and drawings. Like Freud, who despite his genius could not free himself completely from the conditioning of his own culture, Klimt too was a man of nineteenth century bourgeois society who absorbed its ideas and reflected upon its insecurities. Of Klimt's paintings, the ones that best rendered the feelings of impasse felt by the Austrian Empire which was 'heir to a rich and varied past, but no longer knew where it was going', were the paintings that earned him a place in the history of his time. From when he first gave expression to the universal experience of life's transience and mankind's passage from life to death in his university paintings, otherwise known as

his humanity paintings, Klimt remained enthralled by it and reiterated it throughout the rest of his work again and again.

In comparison to France, at the turn of the century, where the new social and industrial realities were causing a violent cultural and political crisis, the German-speaking world seemed quite stable as it clung to its traditional forms and values. However, in reality it was no more secure than any of the rest of Europe at the time. Indeed, Michael Gibson likened the gradual decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to that of the 'almost imperceptible sinking of a luxury liner'. (7, p. 78). Vienna, which was the seat of helm to Franz Josef I of the Hapsburgs and his slowly sinking Empire, was 'sending forth the ultimate rays of its delicate and sentimental sensuality'. (7, p. 95)

This was the Vienna that inspired Freud to seek an explanation for all the neurosis he saw around him, and prompted Klimt to paint not the appalling social realities of the Viennese slums, but transience, beauty and sensuality. Although no comparison could ever bridge the miles between the work of Freud and Klimt, they were both aware of, and sensitive to the tensions and conflicts that existed in the world around them, and each in his own way explored the major themes of the time; the transience of life, death, sexuality, love, and women.

Freud wrote of the transience of life,

The proneness to decay of all that is beautiful
and perfect can, as we know, give rise to two
different impulses in the mind. The one leads to
the aching despondency felt by the young poet,
while the other leads to rebellion against the
fact asserted. No! it is impossible that all this
loveliness of Nature and Art, of the world of our
sensations and of the world outside, will really
fade away into nothing. It would be too senseless
and too presumptuous to believe it. Somehow or
other this loveliness must be able to persist and
to escape all the powers of destruction. But this
demand for immortality is a product of our wishes
too unmistakable to lay claim to reality: what is
painful may none the less be true. I could not
see my way to dispute the transience of all
things, nor could I insist upon an exception in
favour of what is beautiful and perfect'. (4,p.
287).

Klimt was not a man of words like Freud. Although he described himself as not very well educated, he was well read according to his contemporaries and is known to have had quite an extensive library. He was alleged to have been well acquainted with literature and philosophy, including the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, and to have been knowledgeable on the history of art, and keenly interested in everything new.

Because of Klimt's aversion to writing, very little written evidence has been recorded of his opinions of his paintings. This is no accident, for Klimt's message is a visual one and he believed his paintings spoke for themselves. Therefore his attitudes and indeed, even his influences are to be found in his paintings and drawings. It is believed from a commentary written by Ferdinand von

Feldegg in 1900, that the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer whose pessimistic and atheistic metaphysics of salvation influenced both the Symbolist composer Richard Wagner and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, also had a direct influence on the university faculty painting 'Philosophy' by Klimt. The main literary source of Klimt's painting has been pinpointed to a passage from Schopenhauer:

> ... without doubt it is the knowledge of death, and then the contemplation of the suffering and hardship of life, that gives the strongest impulse to philosophic reflection and metaphysical exegesis of the world. (17, p. 131).

As Klimt became increasingly less reliant on commissions for historicist paintings, the themes of love and death in the face of life's transience showed themselves to be the central themes in his work. As an historicist painter during the early years of his career, Klimt had been deeply influenced by the work of the Viennese master Hans Makart, and as a result of his early training, Klimt had developed an extensive knowledge of ancient myths and their use of symbolism. As a Symbolist painter who was obsessed with the female body, Klimt expressed all the major themes in his work through his paintings and drawings of female sexuality and women. His portrayal of women spanned from the iconic image of the perfect woman (as in the Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer, 1907), to sex object and plaything (his erotic drawings depict this image of womankind), to femme fatale (Judith I, 1901), and finally to his portrayal of Emilie

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Floge, one of his closest life long companions, as the independent woman of 'great self assurance'. (17,p. 264).

The theme of women and death is present in the art of Klimt in two ways. On the one hand the theme of life and death pervades his paintings of the life-cycle and struggle against 'the hostile powers' of humankind which is predominantly represented by women. Klimt's other portrayal of women and death is manifest in his depictions of the femme fatale. His first monumental expression depicting the vulnerability and transience of human life in the face of death appeared in the University faculty paintings, which he was commissioned to do with Franz Matsch in 1894, by the Imperial Ministry of Culture and Education's Artistic Board. In the first of these paintings, Philosophy (1899-1907, Fig. 11), can be seen a towering group of figures who hover aimlessly in space, and who are described in the catalogue of the eighth Secession exhibition where it was first publicly shown, as 'incipience, fertility, decay'. (5, p. 77). To the right of the picture the mystery of the universe and the globe are made manifest in the barely discernable image of a sphinx, which emanates from the surrounding cosmos. A figure of enlightenment (Knowledge), rises from below the entangled tower of humanity to the left of the picture and gazes directly out at the viewer .

Descending from the top of the mass of human life, Klimt portrays childhood and youth, then a man and woman who are

Fig. 11 - <u>Philosophy</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1907.

seemingly unaware of one another. Just below to the right of the young woman's thigh, a couple embrace, oblivious to the rest of humanity. The bodies continue to the left hand bottom corner where a shriveled old man covers his face with his hands in despair. Just to his right looms the female head of Knowledge. The figures float in the starry void connected from top to bottom by a swirling black veil. All humanity have their eyes closed or faces covered, giving the impression that they are somehow in tune to, or doing the will of the sleeping sphinx in the starry heaven. Only Knowledge with her half covered face, stares directly out of the picture. Although both men and women are present in this painting, the female presence in the picture as a whole, is far more dominant. Klimt portrays the unconscious forces of nature as a female sphinx, while the head of Philosophy suggests the 'existence of an alert intelligence'. (5, p. 77). There is no solace or help to be found in either the unconscious image of the sphinx or the cold steady stare of Knowledge for suffering humanity or the old man in the bottom left hand corner, who covers his face in ultimate despair as he withers away towards death. A sleeping baby who is half cut off by the right hand edge of the picture, drifts into the starry void, perhaps suggesting that like the rest of mankind, this too is to be its fate. Although the personification of death is not actually present in this painting the inevitable end in the life cycle of mankind is made clear as the figures fall from youth to decay.

In Medicine (1899-1907, Fig. 12), the skeletal presence
of death stands amid an entangled group of naked human
figures who are, like the figures in Philosophy, floating in
a timeless void. Just below death's shoulder a crooked and
withered old man covers his head with his hands in despair.
A pregnant woman with her hands folded over her swollen belly
hovers above the old man just to the right of death.
Meanwhile, death looks over at the naked young woman
Gottfried Fliedl identifies as 'Life', a 'solitary figure
placed opposite and apart from the group of people' (5, p.
81), who hovers on a twist of black veil to the upper left of
the painting. Two old heads appear, male and female, above
a young man who is shown from the back and whose arm reaches
out from the crowd of human beings and is hidden behind the
naked body of 'Life'. Although these two figures do not
actually touch, the gesture of the man's outstretched arm is
significant in that it makes a visual connection and suggests
a union between the sexes. Her left hand then reaches up, as
if she is in some kind of trance, limply pointing in the
direction of a woman in the group holding a newly born baby
close to her ripe and swollen breasts. Just beside this
woman and child, to the right, a sickly head appears from
behind Death's shoulder, shrouded in some of the black veil
that tumbles down the writhing knot of human life. Above the
two figures who sit with their backs turned from the viewer,
towards the bottom right hand corner of the painting, are
three female faces. The first is of a beautiful young woman,
the second is more worn and middle aged, and the third is

Fig. 12 - <u>Medicine</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1907.

that of an old woman. A female head hovers at the right hand edge of the painting, just above them, her hands covering her face once again in despair. Two young men lie to the left of the despairing female head, as one young man covers the other's mouth. Below them and at the feet of death, another beautiful young woman clasps her hands together under her chin as if in some kind of rapture or blissful dream. Left of her there are two women, one with her head bent downwards and the other with an innocent infant curled up securely on her shoulder. Rising from the bottom centre of the painting looms the figure of Medicine (Hygieia), who in Greek mythology was a snake changed into human form, and who found a 'miraculous palliative and cure' (5, p. 81) for life's deep sufferings. In contrast to the rest of humanity, she is the only figure in the painting that is clothed, and the only being whose eyes are open and alert. She stares out of the painting like some 'austere and distant archetypal mother'. (5, p. 81). Her expression is solemn and her gaze is steady. A serpent coils itself around one of her arms to drink the waters of Lethe, from the bowl she holds up in her other hand.

Once again, women play a dominant role in this painting. Through them Klimt depicts life's cyclical revolutions of growth and decay. Pregnancy, motherhood, life, health, old age and ugliness are all portrayed in female form. According to Fliedl, Klimt was not only fascinated by the tensions and antagonism caused between

nineteenth century rationalism and irrational nature, but also between patriarchal culture and chaos. To portray this he used 'woman as an allegorical vehicle', (5, p. 81), and as natural female forces these women both gave men life and threatened death.

In Klimt's Beethoven Frieze (1902), which was done with direct reference to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony's final chorus, and whose central theme was the 'salvation of weak mankind through the mediation of art and love', (5, p. 105), women are divided into two clear categories. The chaste and virtuous women bless the golden knight (Fig. 14) on his quest to find happiness, while the evil women are manifest in his depiction of the 'Hostile Forces' (Fig. 13), with the exception of a huge ape-like monster. This monster is Klimt's interpretation of the Greek giant Typhoeus against whom even the gods fought to no avail. The hostile forces consist of the three Gorgons from Greek mythology, (Stheno, Eurylale, and Medusa), Sickness, Death, Madness, Excess, Lust, Lasciviousness, Gnawing Grief, and the daughters of Typhoeus. Although the original catalogue for the Beethoven exhibition in 1902, which the frieze was created for, describes its central theme as 'the liberation of mankind' (5, p. 108), Fliedl takes the view that this is not so. He argues that the hero of the frieze is not out to save mankind, but himself.

> The male in Klimt's series of pictures undergoes a
> moral pilgrimage in which he has to prove the
> value of his own identity ... Rather than bringing
> salvation, he seeks it! And the threat to his

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Fig. 13 - <u>The Hostile Forces</u>, from <u>The Beethoven Frieze</u> by
Gustav Klimt, 1902.
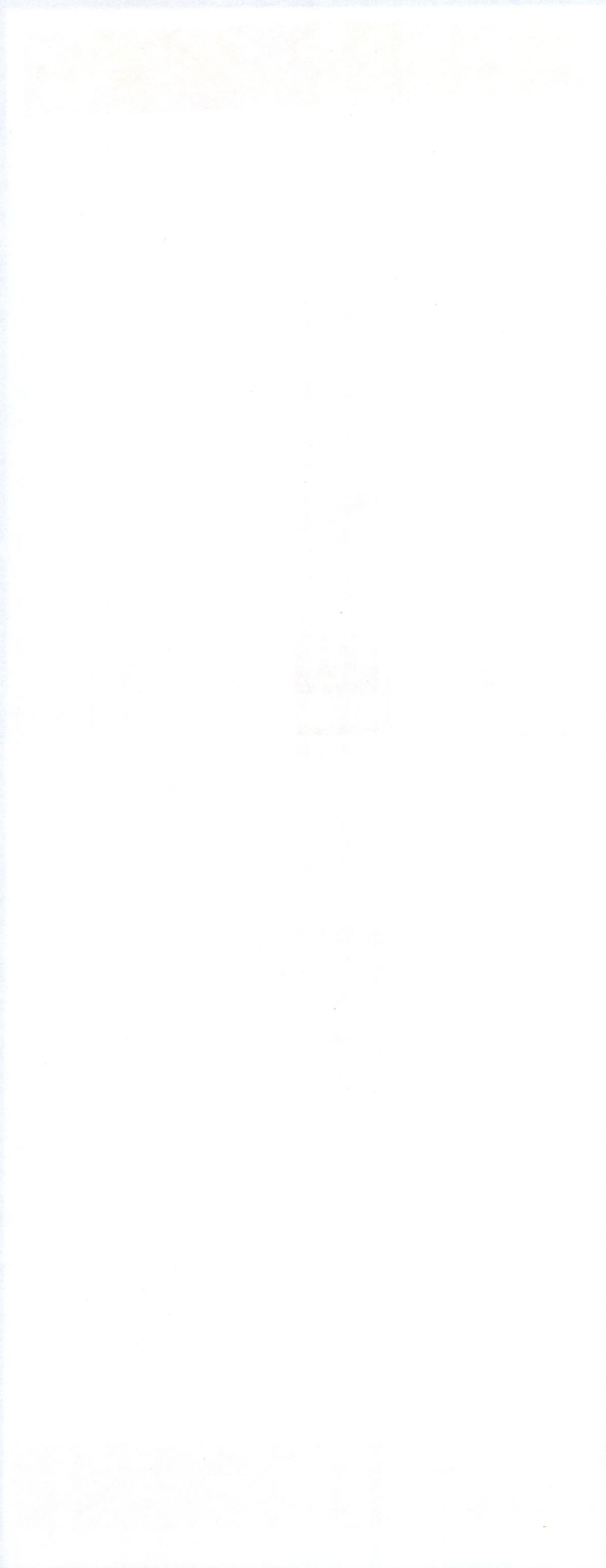
identity comes from the anxiety fantasies spawned by the crisis of the male liberal ego. The 'hostile forces' which he has to withstand are all female ... shown as ugly, repulsive and aggressive. Their sexuality is meant to have a threatening quality. They are allegories of the untamed, unrestrained instincts of the female as a real 'hostile power'. (5, p. 106).

In the Frieze of the 'Hostile Forces', Death is not hinted at by the ageing process of the life cycle as in Philosophy, nor is it a skeleton juxtaposed to life-giving pregnant women as in Medicine, but is depicted as a hideous and withered woman. Situated in the upper left hand corner of the frieze, above the Gorgons with their serpentine hair, Death gazes out ferociously, her arms hanging limply from the elbows, her wasted breasts sag and her thin strands of hair frame her skeletal face. However, even in the last part of the frieze, The Yearning for Happiness Finds Fulfillment in Poetry, where a nude man with his back turned on the viewer engages in a 'Kiss to the Whole World' (Fig. 14), both Angelica Bauer and Gottfried Fliedl express the view that something is amiss. Far from being a moment of ultimate surrender, unity and happiness between the sexes, the man's posture and the tautness of his back muscles, lead Bauer to believe that he engages in a Kiss to the Whole World 'as though in fear' (1, p. 156); while Fliedl believes that; 'In its motionless finality it seems tantamount to "passionate death"'. (5, p. 109).

In Klimt's Three Ages of Woman (1905, Fig. 15), he returns to the theme of the human life cycle, except this

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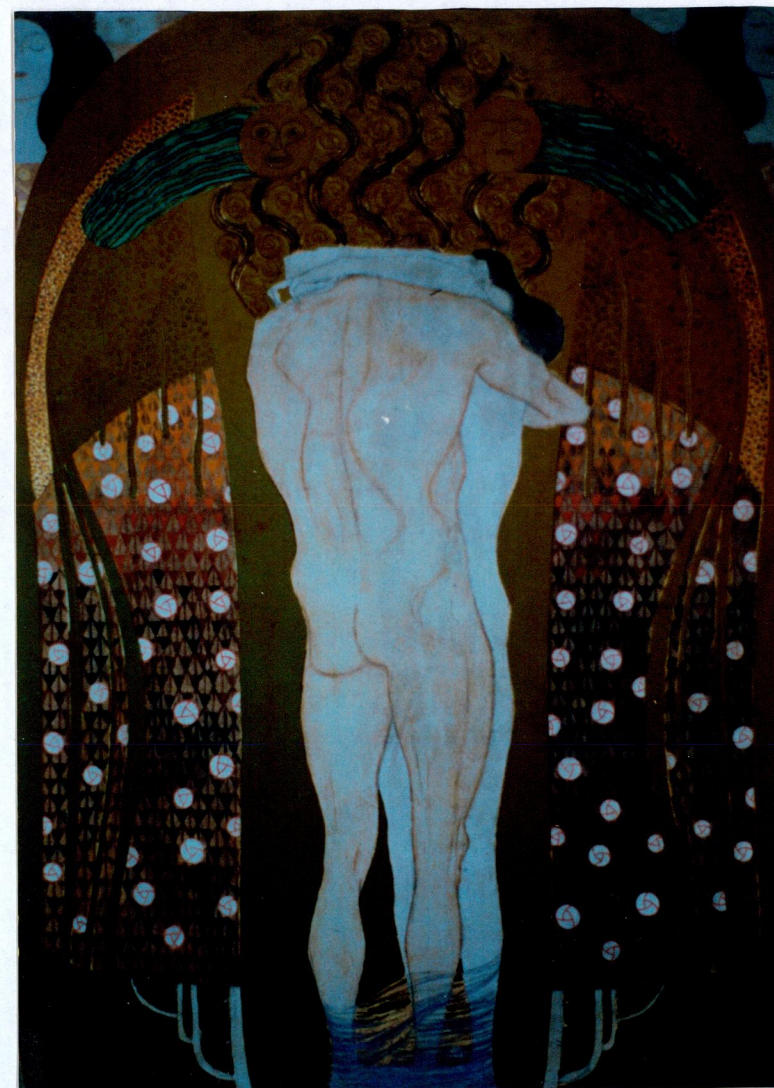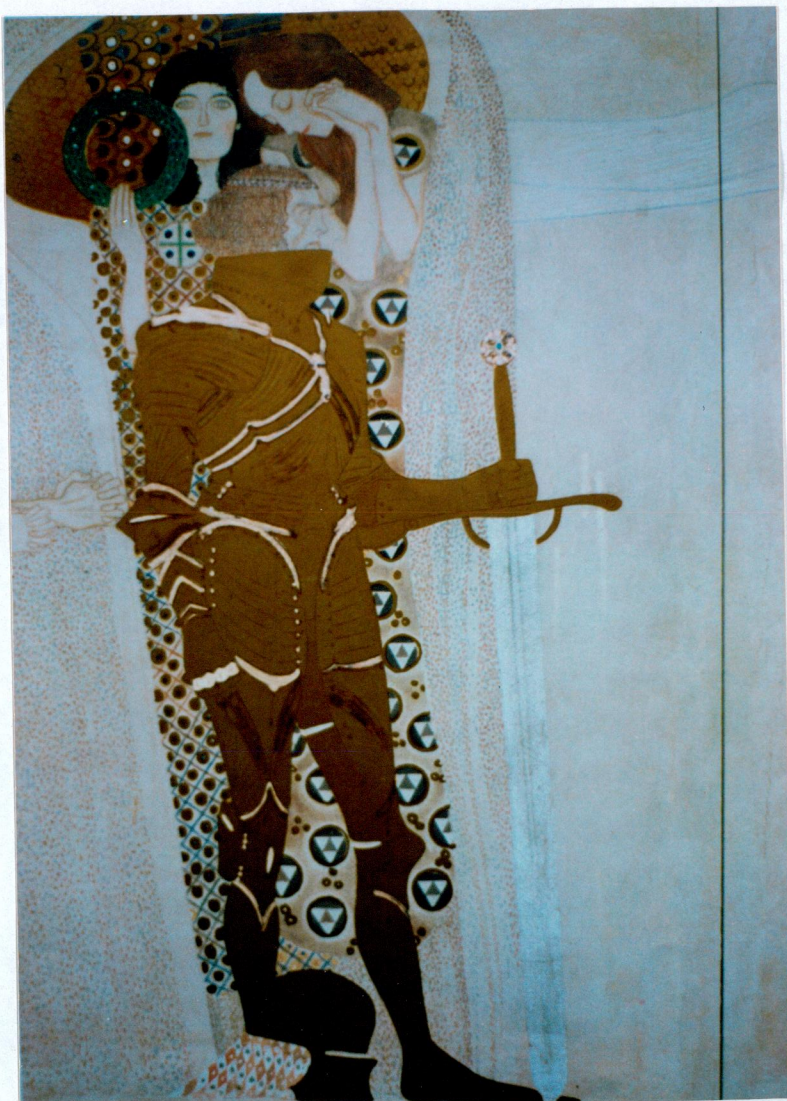
Fig. 14 – <u>The Golden Knight</u> and <u>Kiss to the Whole World</u>
from <u>The Beethoven Frieze</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1902.

time there are no men present whatsoever. By juxtaposing a stylized image of a young mother and child, and a Naturalistic depiction of a despairing old woman with her hands covering her face, he once again points towards the transience of life and the inevitability of death. While the somnolent young woman and her child symbolize both pre-natal regressive harmony, and youth that still has all of life's dreams and possibilities on its side, the old woman symbolizes the obdurate reality of decay and death. The only male element in the painting, according to Fliedl is the central abstract strip of ornamental decoration in which the women are incased, which suggests '...a life cycle - perceived as both feminine and natural - subject to male domination in subject and form'. (5, p. 120).

In 1916 Klimt completed an oil painting titled 'Death and Life' (Fig. 16). To the right hand side of the picture a knotted group of bright human figures representing mankind, tilt towards death, whose skull head peers at them gleefully from the upper left hand corner. A murky green void totally separates death from the living, who in their somnolent trance seem quite oblivious and unperturbed by his hovering presence. Once again the majority of mankind is represented by women, both young and old, with the exception of the baby a young mother holds lovingly and the man bent over the woman towards the lower right hand corner. This painting is both a variation of the theme in the Three Ages of Woman, depicting a young mother and her child and below her an old

Fig. 15 - <u>Three Ages of Woman</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1905.
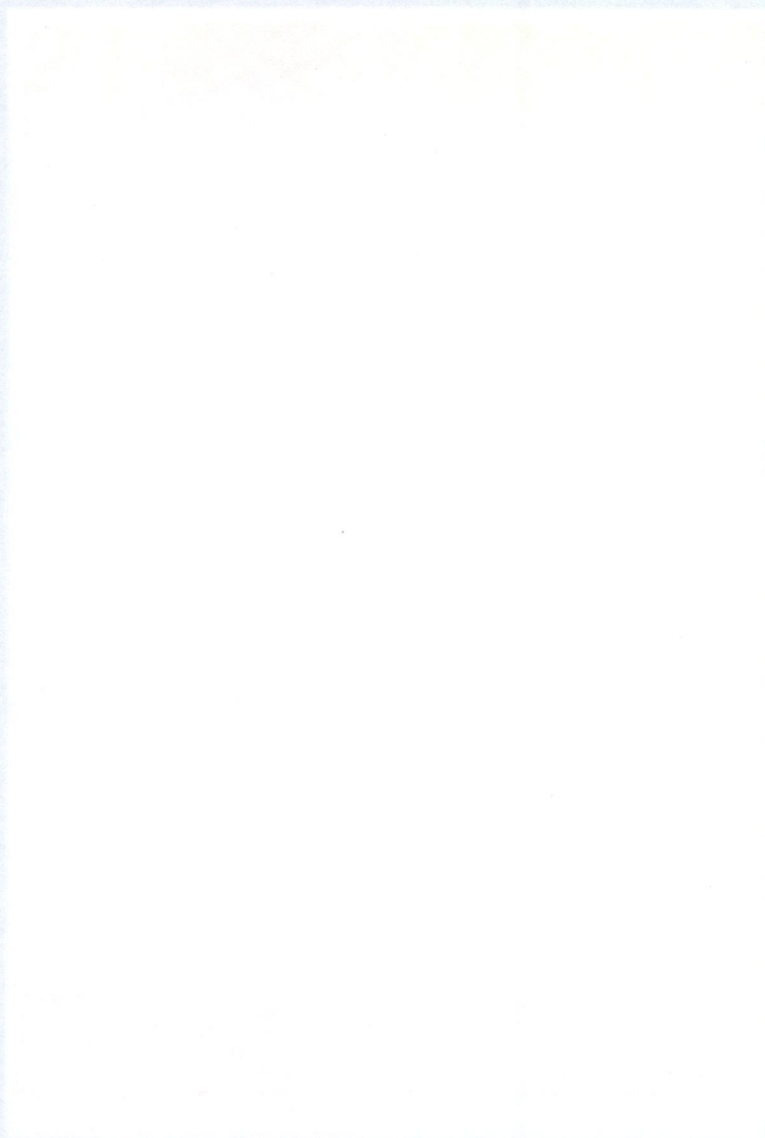
Fig. 16 - <u>Death and Life</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1916.

woman, and a painting about the refuge of Eros as a comforter; but in the end, Death is waiting.

One of Klimt's most famous combination of woman and death can be found in the form of the femme fatale in <u>Judith I</u> (1901, Fig. 17). In this painting he transformed a traditional Jewish heroine from a woman who saved her entire race by her brave and clever actions, into a lascivious seductress. Klimt has painted Judith as a sensuous vision of female sexuality against a gold, black and green background. She is cut off from the pubis down by the lower frame of the picture, and is naked except for two complementary jewel studded gold bands around her neck and hips, and a translucent garment that half hides one of her breasts. At the bottom right hand corner of the painting she holds the dark severed head of Holofernes who is just visible. With half closed eyes and slightly parted lips she gazes erotically out of the picture. She is available and yet unpredictable, which makes her all the more sexually evocative. Klimt has turned her advantage over Holofernes against her. No longer is she the controlled heroine who triumphs over Holofernes for her people, because of his greed and lust, but instead she has fallen victim to lust herself. Judith is another personification of the threat that nineteenth century men felt in a changing world where women were beginning to recognize and demand their rights in a hitherto completely male dominated society. Felix Salton described Klimt's Judith in 1903 as
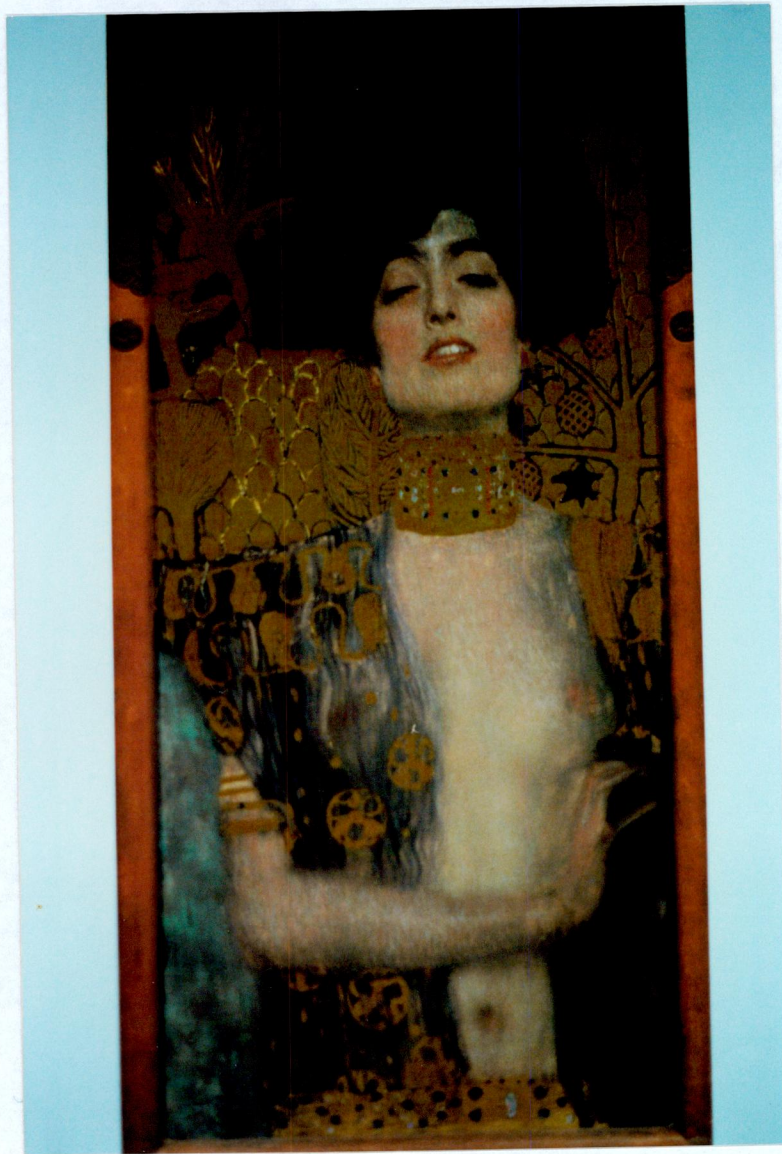
Fig. 17 - <u>Judith 1</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1901.

a slender sinuous creature with smouldering fire
in her dark eyes and a cruel mouth ... puzzles and
powers seem to slumber in this alluring woman,
energy and violence impossible to curb if the
glowing coals dampened by bourgeois society were
ever to ignite. (17, p.251).

Hope I is one of the most controversial, multi-layered
and diversely interpreted images that Klimt ever painted.
(See Fig. 18). The many levels at which it can be
appreciated are accounted for by the overall ambiguity of the
work. It depicts the profile of a beautiful young woman with
bright red hair who is well advanced in pregnancy. Behind
her loom the grotesque faces of four ghastly and threatening
beings. Death and Sickness, the two main spectres in
Medicine, appear directly above the woman who looks out of
the painting with a calm and steady gaze, and away from the
threatening background behind her. Although a satisfactory
explanation has not been found for the other two figures that
loom behind the young woman, Gottfried Fliedl believes that
the title of the painting corroborates the interpretation of
them as Vice and Misery. (5, p. 129).

Arthur Roessler believed that Hope I portrayed woman as

entirely naked, as living vessel in which the hope
of mankind, safe in the warmth of mothers blood,
grows towards the time when it will be roused from
mysterious darkness to the light of day. (17, p.
256).

Other interpretations have taken it to the opposite extreme
and declared it to be a depiction of 'satanic motherhood'.
(5, p. 129). According to Susanna Partsch all the elements
of Klimt's diverse views of women (as mother of God, femme

Fig. 18 - <u>Hope I</u> by Gustav Klimt, 1903.

fatale, costly plaything, sexual object) are present, and combine with each other along with the themes of love and death to create a woman who symbolizes 'both lasciviousness and motherhood'. (17, p.256).

She also argues that the blue band in the painting refers to the Beethoven Frieze and can be equated with 'yearning for happiness', while the four figures in the background refer to the 'hostile powers', and they pose a threat not so much to the mother as the unborn child in her womb. (17, p. 256).

Gottfried Fliedl believes that the young woman's wavy red hair symbolically presents the threatening sexual aspect of woman, because in other paintings Klimt used it as a device to symbolize the 'erotic and therefore threatening nature of women ...' (5, p. 128).

Although Klimt came back to some of the themes of Hope I later in his life when he painted Hope II, never again did he paint them so poignantly. What Klimt had created in Hope I was an image of woman that was profoundly multifaceted.

CONCLUSION

The work of Gustav Klimt, then, serves to illustrate a
patriarchal tradition of equating women with death, which
dates back to the dawn of history.

Hope I is a union containing, like the ancient
archetypal goddess, both the erotic death-threatening femme
fatale and the mother who through her gift of life insures
mankind's survival against death.

> He painted woman as a witch, as a sorceress, with
> the knowledge not only for mixing the love potion
> but also for destroying man; as the vamp of the
> fin de siecle, the seductress, the femme fatal,
> without salvation for the man thirsting for
> love... (1, p. 12).

What Klimt captured in his painting again and again was
not only a cultural and historical nineteenth century male
view of woman as the 'other sex', but an ancient ambivalence
felt by man about woman down through the ages, that erupted
to the surface of his psyche at particularly stressful and
vulnerable points in history.

Edwin Mullins believes that it is because of the
doubting anxieties men feel about their dominant role in the
world that they have developed such an overwhelming need to
defend it from women who are the only other beings on the
earth to challenge it, by repressing, subordinating and
controlling them. These 'anxieties are about how this vision

of himself' as a 'creature who is strong, dominant, decisive, good, virile and wise', can be 'made to hold once he stands beside his most natural partner, woman'. (16, p. 223). Freud too noted this from his reading of anthropology where he discovered that primitive tribes did not enjoy uninhibited sexual activity as he expected, but had as many rules and taboos as did the men of his day. He also expressed the idea that where men had to find their role in the world, nature had already given women theirs by virtue of their sexuality.

Gustav Klimt as a man of the turbulent nineteenth century, through his paintings depicting women, death and the life cycle, gave expression to the undermining threat the new era with its changing sex roles posed to his liberal male ego. Although Klimt's work was symptomatic of his age, it also reiterated the same male anxieties that had been felt since before the beginning of patriarchy.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1862:

Gustav Klimt, born in Baumgarten, the second of seven
children to Anna née Finster and Ernst Klimt, a gold
engraver, on the 14th of July.

1868:

Starts at city school in Vienna.

1876:

Klimt leaves school and obtains a two year scholarship in
the School Of Arts And Crafts.

1877:

His brother Ernst Klimt joins him. The Klimt brothers
and Franz Matsch transfer to Ferdinand Laufberger's
painting class in 1878.

1879:

The Klimt brothers and Franz Matsch are commissioned by
Laufberger to execute sgraffiti in Art History Museum in
Vienna. They help prepare Makart's pageant for the
Emperor's Silver Wedding Jubilee.

1880:

They receive their first commission from Fellner and
Helmer, to do a ceiling picture for the Spa Rooms in

Karlsbad. Klimt brothers and Matsch paint four ceiling pictures in the Viennese Palais Sturany.

1881:

Laufberger dies. Study further with Julius Victor Berger. 'Company of Artists' set up by Klimt brothers and Matsch. Are commissioned to contribute to 'Allegory and Emblem'.

1883:

Studies finished, move to their own studio.

1885:

Company commissioned to do work on theatres in Bucharest and Fiume and to carry out the sketches for Villa Hermes in Lainz by Makart.

1886:

Klimt paints curtains in Karlsbad theatre with his brother Ernst and Matsch, and two ceiling pictures by himself. They start work on the New Burg Theatre.

1890:

Company begins work on the stairway of the Vienna Art History Museum.

1891:

They join Vienna Association of Visual Artists.

1892:

The company moves to a new studio. Ernst Klimt dies on
the 9th of December. From their work in the Art History
Museum they are considered for a commission to paint the
great hall of the New Viennese University.

1894:

They receive commission to submit sketches for the
University paintings. Klimt and Matsch begin to go their
separate ways.

1895:

Klimt's style starts to change. He begins work for
volume 3 'Allegory New Series'.

1896:

Klimt receives commission to paint three University
faculty paintings, Philosophy, Medicine, and
Jurisprudence, and ten other smaller pictures on related
themes.

1897:

Twenty one artists including Klimt leave the Association
of Visual Artists and found the Viennese Secession.
Klimt becomes its first President. He starts to paint
landscapes.

1898:

Preliminary compositions for University paintings
criticised and accepted conditionally. Secession's first
exhibition - Klimt designs its poster.

1899:

Completes the music room of the Palais Dumba.

1900:

Klimt wins Parisian Gold Medal for unfinished faculty
painting 'Philosophy' which is also shown at the
Secession's seventh exhibition. Eighty seven Professors
sign a petition protesting that it should not be put up
on the University ceiling.

1901:

Violent protest in the press and in Parliament about
'Medicine' which Klimt shows in the Secession's tenth
exhibition.

1902:

At the fourteenth Secession exhibition Klimt builds his
Beethoven Frieze around Max Klinger's statue of
Beethoven.

1903:

Klimt's three faculty paintings along with eighty of his
other works are exhibited in the Secession. Art

commission want to hang faculty paintings in Modern

Gallery. Klimt visits Ravenna. Koloman Moser and Josef

Hoffmann start Vienna Workshops due to Klimt's influence.

1904:

Klimt commissioned to design the Stoclet Frieze, to be

built by the Vienna Workshop for the Stoclet Palais in

Brussels.

1095:

Klimt and friends leave the Secession. He terminates

University faculty contract and pays back the advance he

had received.

1906:

He paints the first 'gold period' square portrait, and

goes to Brussels and London to work on the Stoclet

Frieze.

1907:

Height of 'golden period'. Faculty pictures completed

and exhibited.

1908:

The Austrian State Gallery buys 'The Kiss' which is

exhibited by Klimt and his 'Artists of Style'.

1909:

Klimt travels to Paris and Spain. End of his golden
period. He organises an exhibition for the last time.

1910:

He completes his designs for the Stoclet Frieze and
enters in the Venice Biennale.

1911:

He enters 'Death and Life' in international exhibition in
Rome and wins first prize. He moves studio again.

1912:

Klimt takes part in an exhibition in Dresden.

1914:

He sees Stoclet Frieze in the Palais in Brussels.

1917:

He receives an honorary membership in the Academy of Fine
Arts in Vienna and Munich.

1918:

Klimt suffers a stroke and dies shortly afterwards on the
6th of February, leaving behind him many unfinished
paintings.

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