

## 25. The Semiotic Virgin

The first time is never the best.  
*ad for a bitter liqueur*

Thus far we have encountered a number of semiotic phenomena that may be used for purposes of deception: estrus signs, female orgasm, male orgasm, and male altruism. To this list I would like to add another important sign, namely, female virginity.

As we saw above (section 6) a woman's sexual restraint is of much greater concern in most societies than a man's. This is often true even for the very beginning of a woman's heterosexual life. Broude and Greene (1976, 414-15) report that, in a little over 38% of the 141 societies of the Standard Sample for which the information was available, a woman's virginity is valued before marriage (information on premarital virginity of males is not even coded). If a woman's loss of virginity takes place outside of the proper marital context, she is in many societies considered "damaged," while in no societies that I am aware of is a man's premarital loss of virginity seriously considered harmful.

Goody reviews cross-cultural data that "... support the idea of a positive association between societies where women inherit 'family' property and those where pre-marital sex is prohibited" (1976, 14). Dickeman argues that "the most extreme forms of claustration, veiling, and incapacitation of women" occur in the highly stratified societies in which there is an abundance of impoverished males at the bottom and a few rich males with concubines or harems at the top (1981, 425). Broude (1981, 638-47) surveys the extensive literature on premarital sex norms for females and, using regression analysis, finds that class stratification, degree of cultural complexity, and especially inaccessibility to children of mothering are the best predictors of restrictive premarital sex norms (above I argued that this last factor offers support to the idea that a woman is acting as an icon of her mother in her sexual relations with men).

Paige and Paige (1981) find that societies with strong fraternal interest groups are especially likely to take drastic measures to insure that a woman is a virgin before she is given in marriage. For example, the Somali perform infibulation, in which the sides of the vulva are scarified and then held together until they fuse during healing. The Egyptian Nubians both excise the clitoris and fuse the labia so that only a tiny hole is left for urination.

Consummation of marriage is obviously traumatic for both parties, and sometimes a knife is resorted to (see Paige and Paige 1981, 88-9, Hosken 1979, and Huelsman 1976 for more on infibulation). When infibulation is not practiced outright, there may nonetheless be a "virginity test" in which it is necessary to prove rupture of that natural fibula known as the hymen or maidenhead:

Like infibulation, a virginity test gives the husband and his kin proof of the bride's virginity. Final compensation may be contingent on this proof, which usually takes the form of a public display of the bloody sheet upon which the couple consummated their marriage. If the daughter is not a virgin, the father may be forced to pay back some of the bridewealth or, if a husband insists, to take back his daughter and declare the marriage invalid. Failure of the test brings great shame on the father's family and may impair their ability to contract marriages for other daughters. (*ibid.*, 89).

Paige and Paige cite several societies where virginity tests are or have been important, such as the Basseri of southern Iran, the Kazak of central Asia, and the Hebrews described in the Old Testament.

Both the infibulated vagina and the loss of blood during coitus are *signs* of (previous) virginity. Semiotically, both are indexes of virginity. Also, the sexual abstinence implied by virginity may itself be a sign. Some men would like to believe, at least, that virginity is an icon of future abstinence with all men save the groom. Freud says, for example, that loss of virginity creates ". . . a state of bondage in the woman which guarantees that possession of her shall continue undisturbed and makes her able to resist new impressions and enticements from outside" (*SE XI*, 193; cf. Rosenblatt 1974, 90).

There has always been a great interest in the signs of (loss of) virginity in Western culture. Here are some of the alleged signs of recent defloration culled from ancient, medieval, and more recent sources by Havelock Ellis: increased circumference of the girl's neck, deepening of her voice, goaty smell from her armpits, "crisper" pubic hair, loss of ability to urinate in a high arc, and failure to blush (Ellis 1927, V, 203-4). I cite these examples not to consider their validity, but to emphasize that female virginity, or loss thereof, is a semiotic phenomenon.

As with any sign, such as female orgasm,<sup>73</sup> there is a large potential for deception. Simulated loss of blood during virginity tests is well known. Daly and Wilson (1978, 271) mention the thriving business in the surgical treatment of ruptured hymens in Japan. Paige and Paige (1981, 91) cite a report that Ashanti women may insert ants into the vagina just before

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73. Legman (1968, 453) explicitly compares fake virginity and fake orgasm.

the marriage in order to irritate the tissue and thereby cause bleeding at consummation. In some societies there may be pressure to arrange for a virginity test to take place during menstruation. Legman (1968, 453) mentions the Gypsy practice of killing a bird to obtain blood. In his discussion of the "defloration mania" in eighteenth-century England, Taylor mentions "... a girl who had been stitched up four times pleading (in vain) to be excused further operations of the sort" (1954, 187). This last example concerns a prostitute, and shows that preoccupation with female virginity is not only a readiness to interpret signs, but also a libidinal outlet, an expression of male *Schadenfreude*.

Many societies that do not go so far as to practice infibulation or virginity tests nonetheless manifest some concern with whether the bride is a virgin or not. In a number of Western societies, for example, a bride wears white to signify 'purity.' Her bridal veil is commonly thought of as a signifier of the hymen. The Russian word for a bride is "nevesta," which means, etymologically, 'one who does not know' (in the sexual sense; cf. "ved'ma," 'witch,' i.e., 'one who *does* know' — Vasmer 1953-8, I, 178; II, 205-6). It is traditional for the groom at a Jewish wedding to smash a glass under his foot (=an icon of defloration). Legman's *Rationale of the Dirty Joke* includes a whole spate of anecdotes about the questionable virginity of the bride, such as:

A girl's former lover is pressed to say a few words of congratulation at her wedding dinner. He tries to beg off, but the bride herself insists. "Well," he says, "I don't know what to say, so I'll just offer a toast to the happy couple. — Here's to the bride: they say there's just as good fish left in the sea as were ever caught, but I doubt it! And here's to the groom: he's got her — us other fellows didn't. And here's to marriage: it's like going fishing — the fish you really want always gets away, and all you're left with is a little piece of tail." (Legman 1968, 455-6).

A woman's view of virginity (or the loss thereof) is quite different from a man's. A woman may take pride in being (or appearing to be) a virgin when the wedding night comes, just as her male and female kin do. But she has to look forward to some pain at the breaking of the hymen, which is apparently a neotenus and uniquely human organ. Desmond Morris believes in fact that the hymen has evolved precisely to produce the pain and anxiety necessary to put a "partial brake" on developing female sexuality: "... the hymen demands that she shall have already developed a deep emotional involvement before taking the final step, an involvement strong enough to take the initial physical discomfort in its stride" (1967, 82). Understandably, feminists are not always happy with such an interpretation (e.g. Janssen-Jurreit 1982, 200). A quite different view is

offered by Havelock Ellis, who considers the hymen a kind of insurance against male incompetence: "it [the hymen] is an obstacle to the impregnation of the young female by immature, aged, or feeble males. The hymen is thus an anatomical expression of that admiration of force which marks the female in her choice of a mate" (Ellis 1927-8, V, 140). In either case, whether it is Morris or Ellis who is right (or both), the hymen may be said to be originally an organ of female sexual choice. Eventually males too fathomed its semiotic potential, and it became also an organ serving male choice.

Margaret Mead says virginity is a state of *being* for a woman. One *is* or *is not* a virgin. The loss of virginity is something very definite and irreversible (Mead 1975[1949], 174). It can never be regained, and for this reason alone can be thought of as something that is "lost." Or, to quote a collegiate graffito: "virginity is like a bubble on the ocean — one prick and it's gone forever" (Nilsen 1981, 86).

Yet, objectively speaking, can the anticipated slight discomfort and loss of blood really account for the often reported fear and trepidation, the reluctance, and the drawn out hesitation before defloration, as well as the variety of negative feelings a woman experiences afterwards?

Here are three literary descriptions of the loss of virginity:

*Margaret Drabble:*

I was guilty of a crime, all right, but it was a brand-new, twentieth-century crime, not the good old traditional one of lust and greed. My crime was my suspicion, my fear, my apprehensive terror of the very idea of sex. I liked men, and was forever in and out of love for years, but the thought of sex frightened the life out of me, and the more I didn't do it and the more I read and heard about how I ought to do it the more frightened I became. It must have been the physical thing itself that frightened me, for I did not at all object to its social implications, to my name on hotel registers, my name bandied about at parties, nor to the emotional upheavals which I imagined to be its companions: but the act itself I could neither make nor contemplate. I would go so far, and no farther.

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So I shut my eyes, very tight, and waited. It was quite simple, as it was summer and I was wearing very few clothes, and he seemed to know quite well what he was doing: but then of course so did I *seem* to know, and I didn't. However, I managed to smile bravely, in order not to give offense, despite considerable pain, and I hoped that the true state of affairs would not become obvious. I remember that he stroked my hair, just before, and said in his oh so wonderfully polite and chivalrous way:

"Is this all right? Are you all right, will this be all right?"

I knew what he meant and, eyes shut, I smiled and nodded, and then that was it and it was over. Which proves that deception is indeed a tangled web.

And I had no one but myself to blame. But it was something that when I opened my eyes again, there was only George: I clutched his head to my bosom and I cried:

"Oh George, tell me about you, tell me about you," but now it was his turn to shut his eyes and, moaning softly, he buried his face against me while I stroked his hair and the thin brown hollow of his cheek. After a while he did say something which, though hardly distinguishable, I took to be "Oh God, how pointless this is." I was a little perturbed by this statement, though not so much then as later, and after a couple more minutes I got up, switched off the radio, and went off to the bathroom, leaving him enough time to straighten himself up or even, if he so wished, to disappear. I returned, some time later, in my dressing gown, and found him still there, sitting where I had left him, but now upright and with his eyes open.

"Hello," I said, stopping in the doorway and smiling brightly, willing to show anything rather than the perplexing mass of uncertainties which possessed me. (*Thank You All Very Much*, 1969, 17, 27-8).

*Doris Lessing:*

He sat on the edge of the bed, pulled off his shoes, laying them neatly side by side, and began unbuttoning his clothes. Martha lay as if her limbs had been struck by a nervous paralysis, conquering the impulse to avert her eyes, which might have been interpreted by herself, if not by him, as prudishness. There was something dismaying about these methodical preparations. Like getting ready for an operation, she thought involuntarily.

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... Afterwards she lay coiled meekly beside him like a woman in love, for her mind had swallowed the moment of disappointment whole, like a python, so that he, the man, and the mirage were able once again to fuse together, in the future. (*Martha Quest*, 1970, 183, 184).

*Sylvia Plath:*

When I was nineteen, pureness was the great issue.

Instead of the world being divided up into Catholics and Protestants or Republicans and Democrats or white men and black men or even men and women, I saw the world divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another.

I thought a spectacular change would come over me the day I crossed the boundary line.

\* \* \*

I woke to the sound of rain.

It was pitch dark. After a while I deciphered the faint outlines of an unfamiliar window. Every so often a beam of light appeared out of thin air, traversed the wall like a ghostly, exploratory finger, and slid off into nothing again.

Then I heard the sound of somebody breathing.

At first I thought it was only myself, and that I was lying in the dark in my hotel room after being poisoned. I held my breath, but the breathing kept on.

A green eye glowed on the bed beside me. It was divided into quarters like a compass. I reached out slowly and closed my hand on it. I lifted it up. With it came an arm, heavy as a dead man's, but warm with sleep. (*The Bell Jar*, 1971, 90, 92).

The intense anger or feeling of revenge that is sometimes described in the clinical literature (e.g., Abraham 1922, 6; Horney 1967, 52) does not come through here because these women are healthy, enlightened, and have made their own choice. Yet there is an obvious apprehension before the fact, and a depressing disappointment after the fact. Drabble's heroine is so hypocritical and upset at the same time that she doesn't even know what she feels. Lessing's Martha is just plain disappointed. Plath's Esther feels she has been poisoned (death and sexuality walk hand in hand throughout Plath's fascinating life and work). In all three novels the man who takes away the heroine's virginity is definitely not God's gift to woman, but more like an experimental sex object. Above all, the women depicted have been *hurt* by what has happened, though they are reluctant to admit a humiliation that is of their own choosing. Plath's metaphor for both the physical and mental injury of defloration is particularly interesting:

An hour later I lay in my hotel bed, listening to the rain. It didn't even sound like rain, it sounded like a tap running. The ache in the middle of my left shin bone came to life, and I abandoned any hope of sleep before seven, when my radio-alarm clock would rouse me with its hearty renderings of Sousa.

Every time it rained the old leg-break seemed to remember itself, and what it remembered was a dull hurt.

Then I thought, "Buddy Willard made me break that leg."

Then I thought, "No I broke it myself. I broke it on purpose to pay myself back for being such a heel." (*ibid.*, 95).

As if a broken leg were not enough, there is also an image of a new bride as trampled upon (recall the Jewish wedding ceremony):

And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat. (*ibid.*, 93-4).

But if a husband is a father-icon, as I have attempted to show, then ultimately it is the father who tramples the bride:

Every woman adores a Fascist,  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.  
You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
In the picture I have of you,

A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
 But no less a devil for that, no not  
 Any less the black man who  
 Bit my pretty red heart in two.

(from "Daddy," in *The Collected Poems*, 1981, 223-4).

Sylvia Plath is not Everywoman, but she is (or was) a literary artist, and presumably had some sensitivity about the relations between the sexes. The aura of violence surrounding her depiction of defloration is perfectly in keeping with what Karl Abraham said in his psychoanalytic classic on "the female castration complex:"

I know several cases in which women after defloration produced an outburst of affect and hit or throttled their husband. One of my patients went to sleep with her husband after the first intercourse, then woke up, seized him violently and only gradually came to her senses. There is no mistaking the significance of such conduct: the woman revenges herself for the injury to her physical integrity. (Abraham 1922, 8).

The violent injury of defloration can be generalized to other forms of violence, as is shown by the following entries under "tselka" ('cherry,' 'virgin') in a current dictionary of Russian obscenities:

*sidet' za tselku* to do time (in prison) for rape [lit., for the hymen].

*slomat' tselku* 1. to break the hymen 2. to tame, harness *smb.*

*raskolot'sia kak tselochka* to crack/break down (under interrogation) [lit., to break apart like a hymen]. (Drummond and Perkins 1980, 72).

Until the violence of defloration has been committed, a woman may be proud of her virginal state, even if she is looking forward to the pleasure of sexual intercourse. Anthropologists know that a woman's virginity is a matter of pride in many cultures (Russian "stroit' tselku," i.e., 'to build a hymen' is a slang term meaning 'to be pretentious'). But after defloration may come feelings of humiliation. The deflowered woman may be perceived by herself and others as "fallen". In the Plath example she has descended so low as to be flat as a kitchen mat.

If defloration wounds a woman's (and her kin's) pride, it can build a man's (provided the man is not related to her). For example, shortly after Adolph takes away Martha's virginity in *Martha Quest*, we read:

They went down to the Knave of Clubs. Martha wondered why it was that before he had always hastily left when the crowd came in; now he remained, dancing every dance, smiling his uncertain smile, in which there was more than a hint of triumph. It annoyed Martha. Every time she lifted her face and saw that small gleaming smile, she had to smother anger. (Lessing, 184).

Not only is the heroine's anger finally coming to the surface (three

paragraphs earlier it was only disappointment), but the momentary hero's pride is clearly showing as well.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, a man's pride in his sexual prowess is a specifically phallic matter. He is the proud possessor of a penis, and entry of that penis, erect, into previously unoccupied territory is felt as no mean conquest. Conversely, failure to enter that territory or, worse yet, failure to even become erect, is a defeat – for the man identifies with the penis, and its defeat is *his* defeat (see below, section 43, on the synecdochal function of the penis). As far as he is concerned, a penis that does not work is no penis at all, i.e., impotence is the psychological equivalent of castration (an article on impotence in *Psychology Today* [July, 1980, 42] is illustrated with a drawing of the traditional male symbol, the sword and shield of Mars, in which the sword is *broken*).

I will have much more to say on castration anxiety below (sections 44-49). For now it should be observed that, from a male viewpoint, a virgin female is an implicit challenge to a man's penis (i.e., to him). In deflowering a woman a man by definition has to do damage, that is, he has to draw blood. But the idea of such damage inspires a fear of retaliatory damage being done to him. And since it is specifically the penis which breaks the hymen, the man imagines that his penis will be the object of revenge, that is, his fear of revenge takes the form of a fear of castration. Legman cites, for example, a fantasy in which “an ignorant bride castrates her newlywed husband when *jokingly* told to do so” (1975, 614). This fear of castration is heightened by the man's perception that the woman envies him (and all men) his penis in the first place (below, sect. 53), and his perception that defloration will only aggravate in her an archaic hostility toward men (see Freud's paper on “the taboo of virginity,” *SE XI*, 193-208; Legman 1968, 525-34; Abraham 1922; Yates 1930; Flügel 1924, 175). Some scholars, though, believe that the male fears castration by a punitive father figure who ‘owns’ the virgin, rather than by the virgin herself (see, for example, Gough's [1955] analysis of Nayar and Tiyyar female initiation rites).

Perhaps the best folkloric evidence for this male fear of castration is the widespread idea of a “vagina dentata,” which very often is the attribute of a virgin (see below, section 44). In the famous fourteenth century *Voiage of Sir John Maundeville* is a tale of virgins who had serpents in their vaginas which “stongen men upon hire Zerdes, that thei dyeden anon,” i.e., stung men's penises and caused them to die (Penzer 1952, 37; cf. Yates 1930, 178). A form of guillotine used in 16th and 17th century Scotland was called a “Maiden” (Evans 1970, 675; cf. the old terms “iron maiden,” “the duke of Exeter's daughter,” and “the scavenger's daughter” – all of which referred to instruments of torture according to Rawson 1981, 173; cf. also

the Russian slang term “devka” [‘virgin’], which refers to a noose – Flegon 1973, 82). In the various recensions of “poison-damsel” lore (Thompson motif no. F.582) a beautiful young maiden is capable of killing a man by her embrace and her perspiration, by her kiss, by her breath, by her evil glance, and even by her poisonous words (Penzer 1952; Lederer 1968, ch.7).

Apart from folklore, there is a widespread reproductive ritual which suggests great fear of virgins: “It is well known that in many countries the first intercourse after marriage is looked upon with such dread, and as an act of so inauspicious a nature, that the husband either appoints a proxy for the first night, or else takes care that if the girl is a virgin the hymen be broken by artificial means” (Penzer 1952, 36). Among the Arunta of central Australia a newly menarcheal woman was subjected to insemination by not only one but by three different men from three different kinship groups before her husband was allowed sexual intercourse with her (Spencer and Gillen 1927, II, 472ff.; cf. Paige and Paige 1981, 105). In contexts as various as ancient Cambodia, Medieval Europe, the Arawaks of South America, the Marshallese, the Tamil Non-Brahmans of Tanjore, the Circassians of the Caucasus, the Sakais of Celebes, the Ballante of Senegal, and many others some form of the *droit du seigneur* (also called *jus primae noctis* or *jus cunni*) is or was observed (see: Schmidt 1881; Baumann 1955, 78ff.; Crawley 1965, 66ff.; Westermarck 1922, I, 166-206; Gough 1955; Taylor 1954, 31; Penzer *ibid.*; Goodland 1931, 686 for an extensive bibliography on ritual defloration; and Thompson’s Motif-Index T161 for the folklore on *jus primae noctis*). Metaphorical forms of the practice are noted by Slater: “High officials are required to cut tapes, lay cornerstones, and break earth, and it is even necessary for the president of the United States to throw the first pitch of the baseball season” (1968, 69).

The psychoanalytic interpretation of *droit du seigneur* is that in some cultural contexts a man who plans to be attached to a woman for the rest of his life would rather avoid the possibility of castration anxiety than claim the privilege of deflowering her. This hypothesis has not been falsified, and is not at all incompatible with other hypotheses, such as that of Paige and Paige (1981, 105) who interpret the Arunta example as a strengthening of the rights of the fraternal interest groups from which the three men come.

Another, perhaps lesser known wedding rite, is nuptial transvestism. Plutarch (see Delcourt 1961, 2; Eliade 1965, 112) reports that in ancient Sparta a bride’s head was shaved, she was dressed in a *man’s* clothes, and in that state she waited for the bridegroom. At Argos she wore a false *beard* on the wedding night. At Cos (Kos) the *bridegroom* wore a *woman’s* attire to receive the bride. This last example seems to be more a couvade-like rite designed to impress the bride with the bridegroom’s willingness to

take part in the production and care of offspring (see Bachofen 1943-67 [1861], 631-2).

For a man, it is as if a virgin were another *man* (note that, in English, “*virgin*,” “*virile*,” and “*virago*” are etymologically related). Not until he has deflowered her has he ‘made a woman out of her.’

Among the Gimi of Papua New Guinea, for example, a virgin bride arrives at her husband’s village carrying two phallic bamboo objects as offerings, and Gillison infers from this that “. . . when a woman is sexually penetrated, she loses something (a penis) which she *already possesses* – something which she brought with her in marriage as a virgin” (Gillison 1980, 156). Recall also that the legendary *Virgin* of Orleans (“*La Pucelle d’Orleans*,” i.e., Joan of Arc) dressed up as a *man* to accomplish her exploits. Delcourt (1961, 91ff.) reviews the cult of the *bearded* virgin saint which spread in Europe after the advent of Christianity. An example is Wilgeforte (= *virgo fortis*) who was threatened with the loss of her virginity when her father wanted to marry her off to the king of Sicily. She prayed to Christ, who caused her to grow a beard, whereupon her father had her crucified. From that time, she was called Saint Liberata.

The young sharpshooting virgin Annie Oakley in the film *Annie Get Your [arguably phallic] Gun* is simply unable to miss the targets she shoots at in a contest with the man she loves. But then her Indian father comes forward to save the day, as Gershon Legman describes:

Out from under his capacious blanket he takes surreptitiously the biggest, ugliest goddam triple-action barbed-wire cutting pliers you have ever in your born days seen; grabs ahold with his perfidious Red Injun paw of Annie Oakley’s superb *red-gold* rifle, presented to her by the Biggest Daddy of them all, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, and SNIPS the front-sighting sticker-upper dooflicker off the end of her championship rifle with those ugly blue-steel pliers! Annie then cannot hit the side of a barndoor with a cannon, loses the competition, marries the guy, and they all live happily ever after. (1968, 529).

The Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, a homosexual and a misogynist, wrote a tale about a certain Ivan Fedorovich Shponka, who was terrified of getting married. Ivan says he would not know what to do with a wife because he “has never had a wife before.” In a nightmare a whole flock of wives with goose-faces persecute him: he is forced to hop on one leg, he is dragged up a tower by his aunt, and he finally buys a ‘wife’ in the form of a piece of cloth that has to be cut to fit him. Ivan’s aunt, the woman who wants him to get married, is an extremely masculine virgin:

Aunt Vasilisa Kashporovna was at this time about fifty. She had never married, and commonly declared that she valued her maiden state above

everything. Though, indeed, to the best of my memory, no one ever courted her. This was due to the fact that all men were rather timid in her presence, and never had the courage to make her an offer. "A girl of great character, Vasilisa Kashporovna!" all the young men used to say, and they were quite right, too, for there was no one Vasilisa Kashporovna could not get the better of. With her own manly hand, tugging every day at his forelock, she could, unaided, turn the drunken miller, a worthless fellow, into a perfect treasure. She was of almost gigantic stature and her breadth and strength were fully in proportion. It seemed as though nature had made an unpardonable mistake in condemning her to wear a dark brown gown with little flounces on weekdays and a red cashmere shawl on Sunday and on her name day, though a dragoon's mustaches and high topboots would have suited her better than anything. (Gogol 1964 [1832], 183).

Factually of course, a female virgin is not phallic at all. But, if we are to believe the psychoanalytic literature on this subject, the fact that females do not possess a penis is not something males find easy to accept, for it makes them wonder whether or not *they* will be able to keep their own penis. And, if the theory of penis-envy is to be believed (below, section 53), even females may in some cases have difficulty accepting the lack of a penis, and may perceive defloration the same way males do, namely, as a kind of mutilation, or even as a castration. Not until she is deflowered is a woman penetrated by precisely the organ she can never (permanently) possess, and therefore not since she first learned of the anatomical distinctions between the sexes is she so directly confronted with her penisless state.

At the fantasy level, a woman may *be* a phallus, or she may *possess* a phallus. Otto Fenichel, in his famous paper "Die symbolische Gleichung Maedchen-Phallus" (1954[1936]) described examples of the former type. Thus a woman patient had fantasies of herself as a child hanging from her father's abdomen in place of a penis. Another woman patient identified with the talisman her father carried around the world with him in his pocket. Géza Róheim, in another well known psychoanalytic paper entitled "Aphrodite, or the Woman with a Penis" (1945a), reminds us that, according to Hesiod, the virgin Aphrodite sprang from the foam (*afros* in Greek) formed by the remains of the *penis* of her father, Ouranos, who had been castrated by Kronos. Aphrodite was not only the Greek goddess of feminine beauty, but was an aggressively sexual figure (some of whose variants or descendants threatened men with castration – Friedrich 1978, 68), was a lover of the penis (i.e., was *philommeidēs* – *ibid.*, 202-4), and wore an irresistible cestus or girdle under which was supposedly hidden her own penis (Róheim). Eventually she fused with a phallic Hermes (or with the figure of an ithyphallic herm) to form the unquestionably phallic figure *Hermaphrodite*, the protector of sexual intercourse (Róheim, 352; cf. Laferrière 1977a, 72; Friedrich, *ibid.*, 205-6; see Howard 1979, on the hermaphroditic aspects

of the portrayal of Venus in the history of painting; Delcourt 1961 for a general treatment of the widespread cult of the "bisexual figure" of Hermaphrodite in classical antiquity; O'Flaherty 1980 for an extensive comparative study of the mythology of "androgynes," i.e., what she defines as those creatures "simultaneously male and female in physical form"; Baumann 1955 for an ethnological study of "das doppelte Geschlecht" or "Bisexualität" in ritual and myth; and the extensive bibliographies given in these works).

*Real* phallic women do exist, incidentally. They constitute one of the types of possible biological hermaphrodites or pseudohermaphrodites (see Money and Ehrhardt 1972; Stoller 1968) and are occasionally depicted in lewd poses in the pornographic literature. For example, the November 1980 issue of a slick magazine called *Club International* features a series of photographs of "the Boston bat-wanger," a long-haired, ample breasted, lipstick-wearing individual who appears to possess both a fully-developed vulva and a penis. The editors of the magazine claim to have paid \$50,000 to induce him/her to pose. Evidently they thought this phallic woman would appeal to readers. In any case the resemblance between the hermaphrodites studied by medical doctors and exploited in pornography and the representations of Hermaphrodite in ancient myth and art (see the plates in Delcourt 1961 and Zolla 1981) suggests that the ancients may have been concocting their images from more than fantasy alone.

There are contexts, then, where the human female may be thought of as "phallic" (more examples below, section 44). Defloration is one of these contexts. Given a society that is sexist and phallicentric (and most societies are), defloration inevitably becomes an important matter. For the male it is an affirmation of his phallic prowess, while for the female it is a temporary phallic defeat.

But it is a defeat that is at least somewhat mitigated by the new possibilities for future orgasms and future offspring. In the evolutionary long run a woman is willing to be deflowered because defloration is an obviously necessary step on the way to reproductive success. And a man is ultimately very concerned with the bride's virginity because of his need to be confident of paternity.

As was pointed out above (91), however, the male's need for confidence in paternity is something that has to do with genes, and is not something that anyone other than sociobiologists and other evolutionary biologists are normally aware of. Even in societies where great care is taken to define who the social father of a given child is, there still may exist practices which make biological paternity ambiguous, which is to say that proximate mechanisms do not work 100% "in sync" with ultimate strategies. I have

already mentioned the practice whereby someone other than the bridegroom deflowers the bride. Among the Massai, the Kipsigis, and the Shilluk a child whose biological father is not the mother's husband is nonetheless cheerfully taken on by the husband, who claims exclusive paternal rights (Paige and Paige 1981, 93-4). Obviously this behavior would not be predicted by a sociobiologist, but there must be some proximate mechanism(s) causing it to happen that would be adaptive in other circumstances, and not maladaptive enough in this circumstance to preclude the bridegroom's investment in the marital tie. For example, the practice of joint defloration of a bride by several males could be a side-effect of otherwise adaptive homosexual tendencies which help to bind fraternal interest groups (see below, section 47). Or perhaps, as Freud suggested, surrogate defloration helps ward off the bridegroom's fears of the bride's revenge — fear of revenge being quite adaptive in most situations where violence has been committed. And male generosity in claiming paternity to biologically unrelated children may be the result of an otherwise adaptive inclination of males to imitate mothering (below, section 50) and thereby be convinced that paternal investment is worthwhile.

I want to emphasize that the interest which males have in a bride's virginity is rarely a conscious concern with biological paternity. No males in nonindustrial societies know about genes. They only behave *as if* they knew about them. Their great concern about whether a woman is a virgin or not (or about whether she is promiscuous or not) *cannot* be a concern about the fate of their own genes. It must, rather, be something else, some other process which is merely a proximate mechanism operating in the service of genes.

That something else, if we follow a psychoanalytic line of thought (regression), or a biological line of thought (neoteny), has to go back to childhood experience, and specifically to the relationship with the mother. Given that a mate is a mother-icon, as argued above, then concern with the virginity of a future mate reflects past concern with the virginity of the mother. According to psychoanalysts, when a male child realizes that his mother *has* to have had sexual intercourse with his father, the child is upset: "when . . . he can no longer maintain the doubt which makes his parents an exception to the universal and odious norms of sexual activity, he tells himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is not after all so very great, since basically they do the same thing" (*SE XI*, 171). But the fantasy that the mother was a virgin is never quite given up, and manifests itself in a variety of individual and cultural practices, ranging from the simple tendency to put certain women 'on a pedestal,' to the widespread primitive Western practice of worshipping a

man whose mother was supposedly a virgin (the man is Jesus, the mother is Mary, a woman who would have been the perfect bride in any one of a number of nonindustrial societies that practice virginity tests). Jesus is not the only mythical hero, incidentally, whose mother is characterized as a virgin (see: Rank 1952[1909], 78; Frazer 1935, vol. 5, 264; Dundes 1980, 239; see Preston 1982b, 334ff. and Lederer 1968, 119, 173-9 on mother deities who are also virgins). Thompson's *Motif-Index* lists 18 different bibliographic references under "miraculous conception" (T510; see also nos. A1234.1, V211.1.4, T547 and V312).

Dundes summarizes the psychoanalytic view of the idea of a Blessed Virgin Mary: "a son who is born of a virgin can deny that his father ever had sexual access to his mother" (*ibid.*). Translating this into the requirement by fraternal interest groups that a bride be intact, we obtain: a son who wishes his *real mother* were a virgin will prefer that other males never have had sexual access to his future *mother-icon*.