

*the richest of Kings? Am I not of the noblest kindred? Am I not the wisest ... the most gracious ... most generous? Am I not gentle and more tender than any other?*

Christ is the best lover. He is handsome, ardent (and rich!); if this is not reward enough, then

*I will ... make you the queen of the kingdom of heaven. You yourself shall be seven times brighter than the sun ... all that you want shall be done in heaven, and on earth too; yes, and even in hell.*

How can they resist? Fear, scorn, guilt, filth, corruption on one hand; on the other, love, money, rank, passion, power, glory. "Stretch out your love to Jesus Christ," exhorts the spiritual adviser of the anchoresses.

*You have won Him! Touch him with as much love as you sometimes feel for a man. He is yours to do with all that you will ... He makes love His sovereign, and does all that she commands.*

Now, as then, we face the difficulty of defying stereotypes. Exploitation of guilt and desire in women is hardly anomalous: we may not fear hell, but we know that grimy toilets and ring-around-the-collar are the marks of a failed wife; we may not be interested in heaven, but we still long to be Queen of the Prom (and maybe get a Birks diamond). The *Rule's* ideal of the quiet, "good" girl is still with us.

So is the image of Eve, the temptress, though now the degree to which women are able to arouse lust at a distance is a measure of their success. And, as with the three sisters, the manipulation of guilt and desire can still succeed in producing a combination of both extremes. Today, 13 June 1978, the *Globe and Mail* carries a story about the Toronto tryouts for the Silver Anniversary Playboy centrefold. One candidate, arriving early, spends "an hour in the hotel lobby quietly embroidering the Biblical quotation 'Give us our daily bread' onto a piece of cloth as a present for her mother." Why does she want to be Playmate?

*I think it feeds your ego. A lot of people will look at your figure that way, and ... why not? It's not something you want to hide ... I'm using this as a stepping stone to get what I want faster and quicker ... it's basically an insecurity if you can't enjoy a good-looking woman.*

Plus ça change...

## THREE VARIATIONS

### (i) Look, Medusa!

Medusa living on a remote shore troubled no one: fish swam, birds flew, and the sea did not turn to glass. All was as before.

A few broken statues lay untidily on the lonely beach, but other than these there was nothing wrong with that peaceful scene. And so, when the hero Perseus came to seize the Gorgon's head, he thought he might have been mistaken. He watched for awhile, but she turned nothing to stone. The waves roared as waves will, till at last the hidden hero burned to be seen by her whom he had come to kill. "Look, Medusa, I am Perseus!" he cried, thus gaining recognition before he died.

### (ii) The Pond

Birds, wind, insects — the world roared, but he heard nothing, saw nothing; the leaves overhead were blurred for him. He did not pause. Instead he stumbled to the pond where his own beauty was mirrored so plainly for him to see. There he stood, and gazed at himself. He read every feature of that beautiful face. He said, "Who could be worthy of one such as he?" The nymph who followed agreed quietly. "If only I could be the water in this pond." The nymph echoed and was soon transformed. But, since his bright reflection did not grow dim, he didn't notice. He drank from the pond so thirstily that he swallowed himself and her with him.

### (iii) Eurydice

Death was rather sudden, but pleasant enough. He came. I rose, gliding smoothly through the green wood. The going was easy, not rough; I had no hesitation about what to do. Death made it simple: he led, I followed. There was no question, he knew that I would. And I didn't mind at all that he chose the road; I was his forever, that was understood. And so, when my lover came, brave and confident, and won me from Death by means of his charm, what could I do, but prove obedient? He led. I followed till some slight alarm made him look back, and then I fled, since he was not Death's master, but a slave, like me.

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