

UNDERSTANDING BEAUTY AND UGLINESS '16

Interdisciplinary Conference on Art Theory and Philosophy

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PART 1

GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES '16

PART 1 / GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES '16..... 3

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE PUNISHMENT: WOMEN'S IMPRISONMENT AND THE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE BRAZILIAN CASE (MIDDLE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY)..... 6
ANGELA TEIXEIRA ARTUR

MOROCCAN RESPONSES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING: REFLECTION ON THE GENDER DIMENSION..... 12
BAHIJA JAMAL

TACKLING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN MALAWI - SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES..... 13
NIAMH GAYNOR, MAIRTIN CRONIN

MIDDLE EASTERN WOMEN UNDER THE VEIL: A DISCUSSION ON EMBODIMENT DURING LABOUR AND BIRTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT 15
NEDA HODAEI, JENNIFER ANNE PARRATT, ELIZABETH EMANNUEL

THE MEANINGS OF HOME AND HOME-MAKING FOR EUROPEAN EXPAT WOMEN IN ISTANBUL..... 16
DIDEM KILICKIRAN

THE IMPACT OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE – PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY 17
JONAS KLINGBERG, THOMAS OSTERMANN, CANSU B. OZMEN, KEMAL ARIKAN

EFFECTS OF DEVELOPING COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONGST ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF CHILD MARRIAGES - (ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AWARENESS TO ACTION PROJECT IN PAKISTAN) 24
SYED IMRAN HAIDER, AYESHA RAHMAN

VISUALIZING THE FEMALE VOICE:SELF PORTRAITURE AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY IN SAUDI ART25
LINA M. KATTAN

GENDERED DOMESTIC DIVISION OF LABOUR: MEN AND SOCIAL POLICIES..... 37
ASLI E. MERT

HIGHLY EDUCATED WOMEN AND PRESTIGIOUS MALE JOBS: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?..... 38
ASLI E. MERT

THE DILEMMA BETWEEN FANTASY AND REAL IN 'THE TIREDNESS OF ROSABEL' 39
SAHIN KIZILTAS

THE ROLE OF NON-WHITE WOMAN IN THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATION IN NADINE GORDIMER'S NOVELS..... 40
SAHIN KIZILTAS

NEW FEMINIST REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MYTH OF PENELOPE IN WESTERN LITERATURE 45
BARBARA DELL'ABATE-CELEBI

PEN & PASSION: SAPPHISM IN AMERICAN POETRY IN THE 20TH CENTURY 52
GOZDE ZULAL SOLAK, MELIKE ULUSAL

"ITS JUST A JOKE": THE REPRESENTATION OF BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT DILMA ROUSSEFF ON INTERNET MEMES..... 69
LENNITA RUGGI, JULIA RUGGI

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE POLICE IN TURKEY 70
SEDA OZ YILDIZ

PEARLS ON THE PAVEMENT. WOMEN AND THEIR MOTIVATIONS FOR STREET PERFORMING..... 77
MARTINA HANAKOVA

TACTICS OF RESISTANCE IN WOMEN-ONLY SPACES: THE CASE OF SOLARIS 78
MAI ABOUL-DAHAB, MANAL ABOU EL-ELA, AHMED EL ANTABLY

IMPACT OF 'HAVING A SON' ON WOMEN'S INTRA-HOUSEHOLD STATUS 79
SUPARNA DAS

EXPERIENCES OF VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA.....	81
RICHARD BAWULENBEUG ZOOGAH, DOROTHY TAKYIAKWAA	
ARGUMENT FOR A GENDER NEUTRAL RAPE LAW: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.....	93
SUGANDH SAKSENA	
CONSTRUCTIONS OF BEAUTY IN INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE	100
KAPIL SHARMA	
WOMEN HOMOPARENTHOOD: A CASE STUDY	106
FILOMENA SANTOS, RITA DIAS, LURDES MENDES	
NARRATIVES OF FEMALE IDENTITY: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN ENTERTAINMENT FLIERS.....	107
NICKESIA GORDON, LUCIA KLENCAKOVA	
ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS. A PROPOSAL FROM POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY.....	108
ELENA DEL BARRIO-ALVAREZ, BERNARDO MORENO, LIERNI MUNDUATE, TERESA MADUENO, EVA GARROSA	
 PART 2 / UNDERSTANDING BEAUTY AND UGLINESS '16	 117
LOOKS YOU CAN'T FORGET: CRIME AND BEAUTY IN FEMALE TROUBLE	118
ELISA PADILLA	
DECONSTRUCTION OF BEAUTY MYTHS IN BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS BY LOUIS DE BERNIERES.....	125
NURIYE AKKAS	
RE-CREATION OF THE SELF VIA COSMETIC SURGERY IN THE LIFE AND LOVES OF A SHE-DEVIL	130
BERRAK BESIKCI, GULAY BILGAN, NURIYE AKKAS	
ART(LESS) BEAUTY.....	134
ROD MILLER	
THE PROJECTIVE AESTHETICS OF BEAUTY	135
LISOVETC IRINA, ORLOV BORIS	
FEMININE BEAUTY IDEAL IN INDIA: CONSTRUCTION OF A COSMOPOLITAN WHITE BEAUTY.....	139
KALPANA TALLUR RAO	
BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS: DARWINISM AND SEXUAL SELECTION IN VISUAL CULTURE IN THE CASE OF FRANZ VON STUCK'S FIGHTING FOR A WOMAN.....	149
OLGA ZAKIC	
 PART 3 / EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION OF LOVE '16	 157
SEAMSTRESS, A DOCUMENTARY AND MULTIMEDIA SONG-CYCLE FOR SINFONIETTA	158
DONIA JARRAR	
LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN GEORGE ORWELL'S BURMESE DAYS AND 1984: A MARCUSIAN READING ...	159
NINA CEMIOGLU	
HERMENEUTICS OF LOVE; THE DESTRUCTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE NATURE OF LOVE IN VERSES OF HAFIZ.....	160
ALIREZA FARNAM, SAHAR KHOSHDELI	

BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS: DARWINISM AND SEXUAL SELECTION IN VISUAL CULTURE IN THE CASE OF FRANZ VON STUCK'S *FIGHTING FOR A WOMAN*

OLGA ŽAKIĆ

zakic.olga@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

In the painting *Fighting for a Woman (Der Kampf ums Weib)* of German artist, Franz von Stuck, created in 1905, are depicted two prehistoric men in competitive struggle for a woman. The notion postulates of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution penetrated in scientific circles in 19th century and finally found their place in philosophical disciplines and visual culture. Darwinism in Germany was accepted much faster and easier than in other countries because there was created especially fertile ground for that in the works of mid-century materialist scientists. In the second half of the century in Germany, there have been various archeological and anthropological discoveries that have caused numerous scientific debates, initiated by Darwin's theory. Under the influence of natural science studies and researches of its supporters, Franz von Stuck began to create works that visualised primeval men in pursuit of the missing link in the chain of evolution. One of the main subjects of the painting *Fighting for a Woman* is Darwin's principle of sexual selection, as one of the two key rules of his natural selection. Darwin developed that law in the economy of nature for the first time in his *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). As the man of *fin-de-siècle*, Von Stuck painted his work in an atmosphere dominated by voluntaristic and pessimistic philosophy as well as Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, which further deepened Darwin's principles of struggle for survival and sexual selection. Precisely under the influence of these ideas, Munich painter produced his painting *Fighting for a Woman*, which was shown at the 1905 Berlin exhibition of the *Deutscher Künstlerbund* and subsequently printed in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*. This painting depicts two primeval men, represented like beasts, in a deadly clash for woman. Guided by basic drives and animal instincts they fight for her, seemingly passive being, who observes the outcome of the battle in the right foreground. Hominids in this work are overwhelmed by deepest inner impulses, shared by humans and animals, and these are passion and pugnacity, as blinding instincts that drive beings into action. These instincts, which were best elaborated by Arthur Schopenhauer, represent the most powerful confirmation of life, but were also the reason for anxiety of the 19th and the first decade of 20th century. Here, Von Stuck opposed two prehistoric creatures to a beautiful red-haired nude standing in graceful *contrapposto*. Her look resembles more the taste of *fin-de-siècle* than the Stone Age. This painting exactly explores the animal force and essential nature of humanity, embodied also in Friedrich Nietzsche's Dionysian principle. Furthermore, just as Freud examined the darker sexual side of human psyche, Von Stuck portrayed the savage side of human nature, transitional state between animal and man. In the *Fighting for a Woman*, artist contrasted brutish and primitive nature with his image of *femme fatale* with pale skin, lighted by moonlight, as a symbol of feminine. This painting demonstrates how the bestiality of the combat due to sexual selection can be overpowered by the cunning and beauty, from prehistory onwards. It also speaks about woman's controlling potency, which was deprived from her within the concept of sexual selection. On Von Stuck's canvass one can also notice specific artistic concept that he developed, named by critics - animal dynamism, reflected in drawing techniques and poses of figures and it corresponds to Darwin's theory of furious struggle. The main aim of this paper is determining this artwork within the social, conceptual and philosophical context of *fin-de-siècle* Darwinism.

Main text: On the European fine art stage in the period of transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century occupies a prominent place in Munich "Prince of art" Franz von Stuck (1863-1928). His career as a painter began in the exhibition at the Munich Glass Palace during 1889 when the artist made his debut with three paintings of that year: *The Guardian of Paradise*, *Innocence* and *The Fighting Fauns*. His prominent position and significant work in the Art Nouveau and Symbolism domains allowed him professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in the Bavarian capital

in 1895 (Birnie Danzker, 2014, pp. 142-144). As a versatile artist, Von Stuck, with his diverse themes and style he had developed, suited to the complex socio-cultural development at the end of the century. His works reflected the visionary, dual picture of the world. They combined classical mythology, religious themes, the concept of Apollo and Dionysius, taken from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud's ideas and the theory of natural selection by Charles Darwin. Although the artist had attended formal education embedded in the classical postulates and models of the old masters, he paradoxically became interested in artistic practices that have emerged largely as a reaction and statement of resistance to the classical meaning of the image. Like other members of the symbolist movement, Von Stuck was searching for one comprehensive concept of art which was not so much devoted to appearance but to expression of true feelings and ideas (Facos, 2011. p. 339).

Von Stuck in 1905 presented his painting *Fighting for a Woman* at the Exhibition of German Artists (*Katalog der zweiten Ausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes*, 1905, p. 84). This composition is made in oil on canvas and has dimensions 90x117 cm. It is dated and signed by the name and surname of the artist in the lower right angle of the piece. Today this work belongs to the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in Russia. The *Fighting for a Woman* shows three figures in the obscure landscape. Von Stuck took German viewers at the center of harsh battle between two primitive humans who are willing to enter into conflict for the sake of gaining a woman who was painted in the front, right plan of the piece watching the fight. It seems that brutal, atavistic appearance of these rivals does not correspond to "modern" figure of the woman-beholder (Pfisterer, 2009, p. 121). Several concepts can be read from this Von Stuck's representation and the title itself refers viewers to the narrative. Motif that the artist used here was extremely popular in the literature and fine arts at the end of the century while presenting one of the principles on which Darwin's theory of evolution - sexual selection operates.



Stuck, Franz von. *Fighting for a Woman*. Oil on panel. 90x117 cm. Germany. 1905. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

(Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Leonard Kheifets.)

Although the Great Britain was the country that gave birth to the great theory of evolution, Darwinism actually reached its full bloom and the best perception in Germany of the nineteenth century. At the time about the publication of Darwin's canonical book, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859), in Germany has largely happened one major shift from one "idealistic" concept of the world and nature to the explicit "anti-idealistic" and "materialistic" model. In the works of German

philosophers of nature was possible to view a gradual change from the vision of the nature as the established scheme by divine providence to unique understanding of *Entwicklung* or evolution as dynamic and unlimited development of universe (Spahn, 2015, pp. 674-675). Darwin's book translation of 1859 was published in 1860. It was translated first by Heinrich Georg Bronn in 1860 and then in somewhat better version by Viktor Carus in 1866. Good support that Darwin had in Germany he described in his statement that "*support which I receive in Germany is my chief ground for hoping that our views will ultimately prevail*" (Morton, 2014, p. 96). Since the very moment of its publication the work triggered heated discussions not limited solely to scientific circles. Through development of technology and media, the debate over evolution has been introduced to millions of people, including philosophers (Montgomery, 1988, pp. 81-81) and artists. Darwin's ideas were widespread not only in schools but also in periodicals like *Die Gartenlaube*, *Die Gegenwart*, and *Westermanns Monatshefte*. As well, these ideas reached magazines like *Fliegenden Blätter* where Von Stuck worked during eighties as cartoonist, and *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Morton, 2009a, p. 59). On excellent acceptance of Darwin's evolutionary worldview testified evolutionist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel, one of the most prominent advocates of Darwinism in Germany and Austria. In the public debate on Darwinism at the annual conference of the Association of German Scientist and Physicians in Stettin (1863), Haeckel proclaimed that "*progress is natural law, that no human power, neither the weapons of tyrants nor the curses of priests, can ever succeed in suppressing*" (Kelly, p. 22).

The Darwin's theory aspects that allured von Stuck have been the same that German artist Max Klinger has been interested in. These were the animal human instincts manifesting as a physical desire, innate aggression and sexual relations (Morton, 2014, p. 94). Like his colleague from Munich, Klinger painted unsupervised, primordial state of nature and scenes of survival and extinction of lower and primitive types in a narrative cycle *Intermezzi* (1881). Even before the creation of *Fighting for a Woman* Von Stuck has developed a special genre of painting that showed a Darwinian struggle for survival. His composition *Fantastic Hunting* (1890) presents a pattern of conflict between two pairs of different types. Here centaur, embodying advanced being using prehistoric weapon, bow and arrow, overrides helpless faun. The thing which was in common to the artists of symbolism who paints scenes of struggling centaurs - Arnold Böcklin, Klinger and Von Stuck - is that these hybrid beings indicated for them embodiments of primary and animal impulses in humans (Morton, 2009a, p. 76). Friedrich Nietzsche also spoke about dual nature of these creatures in his book *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). A poet and journalist Otto Julius Bierbaum wrote that Stuck "*created fauns, centaurs and the panes based not on the ancient model but rather on the model of nature*" (1924, p. 39). We can read this in the sense that he robed his primordial creatures during the process of evolutionary transition into certain mythological attire, thereby adding an archetypal dimension of its scenes to the ruthless and brutal Darwinian struggle. On his piece *Fighting Fauns* (1889), Von Stuck also showed to the audience a conflict of two competitors, but this time in front of the female spectators. That motif he reduced to only three figures in the composition *Fighting for a Woman*. Although in such structures is possible to read nineteenth-centuries long literary heritage where the scenes of honourable duels between two male rivals had dominated (Ruby, 2008, p. 514), the ideological concept of these particular scenes came from the evolutionary principle of sexual selection.

The sexual selection, besides struggle for survival, meant the principle of natural selection by which evolution works in the nature. This concept Charles Darwin indicated first time in his work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, and then emphasised in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). This rule in the economy of nature attempted to explain sexual, physical and racial differences. Contrary to the struggle for survival happening between the members of the same of different species and with physical conditions of life like severe weather (cold, drought), epidemics and food shortages (Darwin, 2009, p. 106), the sexual selection presents a competition between the members of the same, the most often male sex, aiming to get females for mating. The result is numerous progeny of the winner (Endersby, 2009, p. 88). The sexual selection upon the law of nature progresses the males for fighting. The male sex improves own structures gaining superiority over its rivals during the conflicts and then transmits that superiority into the legacy of male descendants. Hereditary traits that are developed in this way are called secondary sexual characteristics. These includes defending means of males or a tools for attack, mental qualities, courage and aggressiveness, numerous decorations that help to attract the opposite sex, and scent glands which also act for the purpose of irritation females. Good sexual quality inheritance leads toward the development of nature initiating at the end the prevalence of the best specimens, and then of the best species or race (Дарвин, 1977, pp. 202-203). Sexual selection is mostly reflected in the differences in structure between the males and females, as well as in their spiritual abilities. In the outward appearance, all over the animal's kingdom, including humans, males are generally more modified than females. The reason for this Darwin explains by the fact that males are characterized by stronger passion than females. Females

are more passive in comparison to males, but they nonetheless perform a selection and choose a pair that presupposes others (Дарвин, 1977. pp. 211-213).

According to Darwin's concept of sexual selection, Franz von Stuck at the composition *Fighting for a Woman* exemplified the moment before the final encounter of two male rivals. They turn toward each other and face of the left one, which was revealed to viewers of the painting, by its expressive way indicates a strong passion that drives both of them as necessary in order to provide a winner. They show their teeth to each other while preparing to move towards rival by their big hands. Von Stuck not only showed the motive of sexual selection, but his painting reveals his respond to extremely popular subject, which was one of the most interesting questions in evolutionist debate - the missing link in the evolutionary chain (Pfisterer, 2009, pp. 122-123). The painter here tried to answer to the big riddle initiated by Darwin's theory - how humans looked like during evolutionary transition period that could link modern man with his primitive ancestor - a monkey? Von Stuck's answer was to paint a beast - anthropoids who presents half man half animal similar to primates.

In August 1856, the Neanderthal skull was discovered in the Neanderthal Cave near Düsseldorf. As men in Von Stuck's painting, it had thick eyebrow arches, bulging forehead, a lowered mandible, much like an ape. It was felt that this extraordinary discovery can be a potential missing link in the evolutionary scale (Bowler, 2003, p. 209). After Darwin's book publication in 1859, thinking how prehistoric predecessors of modern humans looked like, have become a kind of fashion thing. Ernst Haeckel in his *History of Creation* (1868) tried to reconstruct the developmental stages of organisms through biogenetic law. Haeckel introduced concepts in biology that are applicable today, such as his view that nuclei of the cells contain the hereditary material, as well as the concept of phylogeny and ontogeny. His biogenetic law held that a human embryo goes through the same morphological stage as the kin in the evolution of its ancestors (Richards, 2009, p. 92). He saw this as a proof that humans and animals share the same ancestor. Thus, after this was not possible to consider the man as separated from the rest of nature. In his book *The Evolution of Man*, the Austrian naturalist said that "a man is not above nature, but rather in nature" (Haeckel, 1887, p. 456). His studies have led doctor Eugène Dubois to organize a field work in the Dutch East Indies in search of missing link. On the island Java, Dubois discovered fossils of primitive species naming it in honour of Haeckel's - *Pithecanthropus erectus*, which is now known as *Homo erectus* (Richards, 2008, p. 253). This creature lived in Pleistocene period, before modern men appeared. This was followed by German anthropologist and anatomist Gustav Schwalbe's work introducing straight-line conception of human evolution according to which *Pithecanthropus erectus* evolved into Neanderthal and then to modern man (Sommer, 2006, p. 210).

The Fighting for a Woman does not show mythological, composite creatures, as in Von Stuck's compositions of fighting fauns. Two naked anthropoids, with distorted spine and face physiognomy of the monkeys, are now enshrined in Darwinian, deterministic natural key. The lower level of evolution of these two men which is noticeable at first glance in expression of their corporeality reflects on their spiritual abilities. In their behaviour, as well as on their atavistic bodies, have no glazes of modern civilisation. The painter brought us back to the primordial, prehistoric ages before appearance of modern men. He emphasized, as a central motif, two men indirectly through their ancestors. They are defined by their physical being and stricken by limited conscious will. Instincts that drive them are the primary forces of nature initiating sexual selection as a lever which provides human evolution. This is not about romantic innocence love which Darwin was not at all explaining, but about ultimate plan of nature - a reproduction (Larson, 2009, p. 175). One of the first intellectuals who argued on animal instincts in man was Arthur Schopenhauer. He influenced significantly shaping of the social climate at the end of nineteenth century by his voluntarism philosophy.

Schopenhauer separated the will as the core of everything individual and at the same time of the whole which manifests in each natural force that blindly works. It works where it is not led by any knowledge primarily in animal instincts (Schopenhauer, 1981, pp. 117-120). The forces that drive humans and animals in action are jealousy, passion and pugnacity. These are blinding, unexplained instincts which are presented in a fight of two representatives of male gender. Schopenhauer foresaw many of Darwin's theories and he was quoted in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Дарвин, 1977, p. 533). The British evolutionist in twentieth chapter particularly emphasised the importance of erotic instinct which Schopenhauer examined. In that light, German philosopher said:

"Sexual instinct manifests itself as decisive, as the strongest affirmation of life while it is to the natural man, same as to the animal, the ultimate goal, the highest purpose of life. His first striving is self-preservation but as soon as took care of that, he tends to perpetuate the species. And the nature itself, which essence is the will to live, with all its strength prosecute the man, same as the animal, to proliferate. With this, regarding individuals, it achieved the

purpose and is completely indifferent to his death, since it as the will to live cares only for the species and the individual means nothing to it" (Šopenhauer, 1981, p. 294).

Von Stuck's depiction also refers to contemporary theory by Sigmund Freud. The Austrian psychologist was greatly interested in prehistory and archaeology and he expanded this passion to the psychological archaisms in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Freud believed that dreams analysis can provide access to the subconscious - primordial relapse of modern humans. There was close connection between Von Stuck's archetypes and Freud's analysis which subjected mythological figures into detailed considerations (Barndlhuber, 2014, pp. 49-50). Freud's analytical psychology also provided an insight into atavistic mentality of prehistoric people, which hides in modern humans deeply embedded in the soul and which has been consciously limited due to social desires of modern civilisation. The conscious mind had difficulties to control biological, usually sexual, desires which are by artificial layer of ratio hidden deeply in our unconscious mind. He, like Schopenhauer, during examination of fears and instinctive life separated two main impulses aimed at "*self-preservation*" and "*preservation of species*" (Frojd, 1981, p. 189). He believed that with repression of own primitive instincts man, or his *Ego*, cannot feel comfortable. Also, erotic instincts in humans he connected with expression of aggression and, as he believed, these two instincts always go together (Frojd, 1981, pp. 206-207).

The dynamics of aggressive fighting of two rivals in Von Stuck's canvas is intensified by visual means of artistic expression. In the later period of the painter's career, he has his scenes reduced to central figures and speeded up their motions. Such expressiveness suited Darwinian concept of vague and cruel struggle in nature (Barndlhuber, 2014, p. 54). The rhythm speed up of two hominids in *Fighting for a Woman* is achieved first of all by a diagonal which is displayed in the composition by depicting the figure of right rival, turned to viewers by his back, and the left one slightly curved to the right side. Black contours of their bodies are also completely merged with background of dark landscape with no indications of the real topography. By setting the conflict action into the first plan, the audience is able to actively participate in the events of the painting. Dark, black and gray background of the mountain landscape complements the tension and uncertainty of bestial conflict. For Von Stuck as Symbolist, the colour was of great importance. It had primarily associative, inner values contributing understanding of the idea. Thus, "*black is the colour of the night, of mourning, of death*" as Artur Weese said (Barndlhuber, 2014, p. 59). In Von Stuck's work blue colour is connected with "*endless sea and the vast sky arousing associations with the unfathomable, the eternal and the elemental*" (Barndlhuber, 2014, p. 60). Here that relates to the water surface in the right plan of the painting in background. It is important for several reasons. On the one hand, it leaves disturbing, obscure impression which increases the feeling of uncertainty of Darwinian struggle. On the other hand, in the works of artists such as Gustav Klimt, to whose art a powerful influence was left by monism of Ernst Haeckel, it pointed to fertility and reproductive functions of women in sexual selection and one understanding of conception of Wilhelm Bölsche of the ocean as "*primordial erogenous zone*" (Morton, 2009b, p. 131). The water landscape was important because Darwin's theory of evolution emphasised that the ocean was the first place of birth of all organisms. Based on the examinations of some animal and human functions that appear monthly or weekly, Darwin concluded in nineteenth century that "*some sea shore bathed by tides is in fact the original location of origin*" (Дарвин, 1977, p. 153).

To the intensity of male conflict on the painting, Von Stuck opposed the figure of a woman standing as an observer on the side in a quiet and graceful *contrapposto*. At the first glance, her calm attitude suited to the passive role which Darwin awarded to a woman in process of sexual selection. She is an object of male desire and goal of conquest. Females are less enthusiastic than men, fearful and seeking courtship (Дарвин, 1977, p. 212). At Von Stuck's painting certain ambiguity is expressed in her role. Several authors put forward the opinion that women image here is not merely the result of a male target of conquest in natural selection, but kind of projection of contemporary, predominantly male fears, of changed understanding of the gender roles (Ruby, 2008; Pfisterer, 2009; Voss, 2009). The best witnessing on this matter is a comment in the newspaper *Illustrirte Zeitung* after the Exhibition of German Artist in Berlin (1905): "*The theme of the female and her spellbinding and destructive power, a theme that returns time and again in Stuck's work and reflects the mental content of his Sphinx pictures, is echoed here too. The two wild fellows with no veneer of culture who are about to pounce on each other with bared teeth direct the fantasy of the beholder to the idea that even the distant past was dominated by the consuming power of the female*" (Voss, 2009, pp. 253-254). Thus, the power here was given to the woman. *Fighting for a Woman* like in Von Stuck's piece *The Duel* painted two years later is showing the female figure of extraordinary beauty where is not certain if she will even be interested in a winner. The question appears - who is whose trophy?

The overall incidence of woman, her physical appearance and attitude, indicates that here is about an elaborated motif in the artist's work - a presentation of a *femme fatale*. The concept of *femme fatale* appeared in a large number

by the end of the nineteenth century, when there were great social and political changes on the cultural map of Europe. The mental image of society was largely changing due to technological and scientific advancements caused by the Industrial revolution, growing capitalism and the population increase (Cecile, 1995, pp. 38-39). Now it was demanding to adjust to the new reality which “led to establishment of a fundamentally new, massively institutionalized, ritual-symbolic perception of the role of woman in society which was... a principal source of the pervasive antifeminine mood of the late nineteenth century” (Dijkstra, 1986, pp. 5-6). The fear appeared of idea which is opposite to the many nineteenth century men attitudes and opposite to the beliefs of many biologists including Darwin who believed that men can achieve higher grades in everything than women (Дарвин, 1977, p. 153). The source of such fear was the growing emancipation of European women. If the women achieved the same civil rights as men, that would simply mean rejection and neglecting of her congenital role of mother and housewife leading inexorably to degradation. Naturally limited by own generative role, women had been understood as passive and non-competitive (Hrды, 2008, p. 12). The usage of such arguing was one specific antidote to the tide of feminist feelings (Richards, 1983, p. 97). If woman would not respond to the ideological construction of her distinguishing from man she would find herself rejected as abnormal and stigmatised by retrograde and atavistic marks. Examining the book by Cesare Lombroso “*La Donna delinquente: La prostituta e la Donna normale*” (1983), Charles Bernheimer writes that in that case woman “can be as anomalous as man himself, as perverse, perhaps even more so, maximally anomalous because, as a woman, she is abrogating the perverse qualities of male nature” (2002, p. 148). Great popularity of Freud’s theory on female castration complex contributed to this perception. That phenomenon appears with women in the early stage of childhood during the process of awareness of genital diversity between her and male. Because she is damaged by “the lack of the phallus” she becomes the victim of envy. In her life this discovery presents a turning point. This results in inhibition of her sexuality and neurosis with the complex of masculinity, or leads to the normality keeping this wish in the unconscious. Conversely, in males occurs the castration anxiety, or fear of cancelling his masculine identity (Frojd, 1981, pp. 224-226).

Von Stuck visualised in many compositions these fears painting destabilizing, threatening but at the same time fascinating figures of *femme fatales*, taking the Biblical of mythological motifs. In his creative work dominated images of Sphinx, Salome, Judith and women as representation of sin (Körner, 2000). Common name of all these pieces was the statement of female animalism (Bade, 1979, p. 18). By eroticised and enchanting beauty, women here provoked by seduction sin and vice in men. These images expressed essentially deep anxiety and fear of male subjugation. Sensuality of woman in the painting *Fighting for a Woman* results in causing undermined integrity of males rivals. Her naked body of marble white colour and lush curves with carefully shaped red hair and red lips are in obvious contrast with bestial appearance of male competitors. In the fine arts works at the end of the century that tend to Decadency and Symbolism, the hair was very important as ultimate means of seduction. It can be used as specific sexual weapon of fantastic and at the same time vicious power fatal for man (Bade & Rogoyska, 2011, p. 92). Such connotation is additionally intensified in *Fighting for a Woman* by her red colour as symbol of passion and attraction. Like Salome, who was allured by the ambivalent potential of the Moon (Sully, 2010, p. 50), the figure of Von Stuck’s woman is illuminated by the Moon light, emphasising again her sensuality, eroticism and cold-bloodedness. With her twisted provocativeness, revealed by challenging physicality, she is the one who will bind the will of man pulling him out of the frame of civilized society and provoking his animalism (Ruby, 2008, p. 515).

Pose and disinterested view of female figure in *Fighting for a Woman* induce association of the image of woman of dubious morals. Art historian, Michelle Facos divides artists of Symbolism to those prone to idealistic attitudes and those prone to decadency. Through such a two-way view these artists have shaped the image of women. Those decadents have seen her as a prostitute (2011, p. 339) prone to lewdness and profanity. Simultaneously with the advent of the women’s movement in Germany in the sixties, appeared the problem of prostitution (Ruby, 2008, p. 515), in a time of universal alienation of people in urban areas due to a new industrial and technological changes. This phenomenon has been interpreted in many debates of nineteenth century intellectuals. Lombroso interpreted female prostitution as a kind of degeneration and “Darwinian adaptation”... where they become “antisocial beings who seek only to satisfy their violent desires” (Bernheimer, 2002, p. 149). Excessive eroticism, which was not characteristic of a “normal women” he saw as lever of her profanity (Olrik, 1981, p. 172). The cause of the psycho-social phenomenon Freud found in the suppression of natural sexuality within the norms of civilised society (Bernheimer, 2002, p. 164). In the works of Symbolist artists a woman of easy virtue became a paradigm of the *femme fatale*. The one who lives outside the civic canon without restraint of their animal instincts and makes man equal if not even more bestial.

Fighting for a Woman is shaped by the construction of ideas of *fin-de-siècle* in Europe with many ruling anxieties deepened by biological and social theories. If the man was not the product of the Holy divinity and species separated from the rest of the organic chain in nature, but he sprang from his animal ancestors and has hidden animal instincts which can appear at any moment, then it was the reason for huge anguish. Darwin's theory has sparked an overriding fear of the decline of moral values. John Hedley Brooke states that the concept of the struggle at any moment could be translated into a phenomenon of "aggressive individualism" (2009, p. 199). This means that there was a fear of the return to the former primitive level. The theory that Darwin developed also did not exclude the reversion process of evolution (Darwin, 2009, p. 37). Von Stuck's *Fighting for a Woman* was an excellent example of such anxiety. It expressed concern about the changed gender roles in sexual selection. Especially accented were primordial instincts of humans which according to thinkers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche seem liberating for moving creatures to action. At the end it should be mentioned the guiding idea in Von Stuck's work which he emphasised as the central in his painting in the interview with Fritz von Ostini between 1892 and 1893: "In choosing my themes, I set out to treat only the purely human, the eternally valid, such as the relationship between man and woman" (Birnie Danzker, 2014, p. 119). The motif of sexual selection artist has incorporated here in one wider spectre of contemporary social tendencies thereby achieving an archetypal, a dual dimension inherent in his work.

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