Bad little girls

Carlo Maggini
Neuroscience Department,Unit of Psychiatry, University of Parma, Parma, Italy

Abstract. The characters, in little girl style, who more and more often appear in advertisements, glossy magazines, television programs and megastores, and who can be encountered in the streets of many cities, are not the product of an ephimerous fashion dictated by the logic of the market. They come from far away, disquieting and erotic, and have crossed all the cultures of the western world, fascinating and disconcerting the soul with their power of seduction. They are the nymphs of Greek mythology, and not even the gods were able to resist them, knowing very well that their bodies are a place of knowledge that could lead to insanity. The paradox of the nymph is that possessing her means being possessed. After an overview of the myth of possession by nymphs, the author discusses certain illustrious figures of western culture of the 19th and 20th century possessed by a nymph: Aby Warburg, Martin Heidegger, Carl Gustav Jung, Henrik Ibsen and Emil Cioran. In all of them the possession by a nymph unfolded in keeping with the myth: intellectual fervor was common to all, insanity in Warburg, rapacious egotism in Heidegger and Jung, and a metamorphosis of *Weltanshaung* in Ibsen and Cioran. Nonetheless, they all, in their encounter with a nymph, laid bare their multifaceted identities, the muddy depths and the "heart of darkness" of their souls. (www.actabiomedica.it)

Key words: Nymph, possession by a nymph, Greek mythology, adolescence

1. Socks that have slid down, little pastel colored purses, doll-size backpacks, hair put up in pigtails or braids, clips to hold the bangs in place, t-shirts that show the belly, high heeled or platform shoes, or shoes that are a bit too large as if they had been stolen from mommy's closet.

This is the little girl type who roams the catwalks, appears in advertisements and in glossy magazines, emerges in television programming and in megastores, but also walks down the streets of many cities by now: she has a little girl voice, a suspended and astonished look, a sulky face, an expression of vague boredom as if waiting for something to happen, an ambiguous and indecipherable smile, a knowingly awkward behavior, smell of fruit or of candy, and she seduces with the wink of an eye.

Advertising views eroticism in an offhanded way and seems to be seduced by the dawning of its appearance.

Adolescents with the maliciousness of women, as seen in the most recent publicity campaign by *Sisley* (rural-erotic photosequence by the American photographer Terry Richardson) (1) are one of many examples.

Adolescent bodies caught with looks and poses that mix innocence and transgression, restless and scantily dressed girls who roll in the hay with the farmer's son, play by themselves, or with others, and ambiguously cuddle mules, horses and bulls, young girls who are trying to get sprayed on the face and body with milk and who are piggyback riding, are all images rich in explicit double meanings.

A psychiatrist, who can often be seen on Italian television, when interviewed on the subject, pontificating in the manner of a disenchanted hermeneut, stated the following: "*To be amazed at the precociousness of today's adolescents is like discovering only now that Venice is a humid city*." "*This precociousness*", he added, is an ex-

pression of a "*cognitive and biological growth*" as well as a "*behavioral*" one that the parents have encouraged in their daughters, who are none other than "*the real children of the sexual liberation who exhibit parts of their bodies to identify with each other*," yet, he concluded, in their "*communicating...there is hardly ever malice*" (2).

The psychiatrist, who often causes bewilderment with his belaboured answers, seems once again to turn the terms of the problem over in identifying the object of the seduction of fashion with its creator, in spite of the unconscious complicity which ties the seduced to the seducer. The Professor seems to be unaware that man is at the same time the creator, and the target, of this kind of fashion, and that the sensuous looks and inviting poses are directed towards him, and he is the one who with his gaze contributes to the creation of the image itself. Man is, in fact, the director and the spectator, the creator and the consumer, and the young girl is the creature used, who is only in appearance the protagonist (3).

In addition, the psychiatrist, in the same way, seems not to recognize the peculiar nature of this seduction, which, by now having been deprived of its sorcery, declines into undifferentiated and light obscenity, spreading beyond that uncertain border that Balthus tried to demarcate.

Balthus' girls are in fact, as he himself states, "*idealized, platonic reflections of the divine*" and biographers and art critics, he states, who "*have believed them to be in erotic poses...have understood nothing*" about his work. Balthus, in reality, has tried to "*come closer to the mystery of childhood and its languid grace of uncertain frontiers*", painting "*the secret of the soul, and the tension both obscure and luminous of the gangue of which the* (his) *girls had not yet liberated themselves. The passage...The uncertain and confusing moment in which innocence is total and will soon be replaced by another age, more determined, and more social.*" (4).

It is not my intention to suggest a sociological interpretation of the little girls, and above all of the *bad little girls*, since it would be an oversimplification to consider them the product of an ephemeral fashion produced by the logic of the market, or even more so, by "sexual liberation" or by the cognitive, biological, and behavioral growth that adults have encouraged in their daughters.

The *bad little girls,* disquieting and erotic, come from far away, and have permeated the culture of the western world, capable of fascinating and disconcerting the soul with their power of seduction. This power, as Baudrillard (5) notes, is nothing other than sedition, a subversion of order, an upheaval of the everyday, a questioning of consolidated points of view, an uprooting, a leading astray to another place, a mental rape, and a bewilderment of ones own truths.

It is the artifice of fashion that catalyses the alchemy between seduction, sexuality, and adolescence, creating a triangular device where the individual risks his or her identity and encounters the insanity within. It is the artifice of fashion that, with the wink of an eye, with its hide and seek and its unveiling, makes the natural insignificance of an infantile or adolescent body seductive. Nature and artifice thus are, in the end, mixed up in a tangle in which the body, paradoxically, shows its archaic, primordial and sacred face and solicits its own transcendence in the search for the soul that is hidden in it. The soul, when intuited in its deceptive complicity and mysterious and nocturnal fascination, represents the nostalgic fascination for a lost world.

It is a painful and nostalgic beguilement (6), because adolescence reminds us of our death and of all that was possible yet went unaccomplished, of the sequence of all our repeated nos in life, of unrealized plans, of dried up passions, of unattained happiness, and of our extinguished desires.

2. The western world is guided by disenchantment and disenchantment *"means knowing...that the gods are in exile*" (7). It is, however, we who are in exile: the gods still exist and the power of their stories continues to act.

The gods manifest themselves intermittently, according to the ebb and the flow of what Aby Warburg defined "*the mnemonic wave*" (8). It is a wave that at times floods, and at times retreats from, western culture.

Nevertheless, the world continues to be the priviledged place of their epiphanies, and the social life that progressively has invaded and annexed vast regions of religion, at first superimposing itself on it and then infiltrating it in an insane mixture, and finally in

engulfing it, becoming the privileged place of the gods' epiphanies.

The *bad little girls*, again, come from far away, and are pagan goddesses, are nymphs.

Announced, for the first time in Florence in the 1400s, by the breeze that rippled their dresses, they have never stopped watching us from fountains, fireplaces, ceilings, columns, balconies, news stands, balusters, and now from television, newspapers and streets (8).

The gods, being attracted to nymphs more than to humans, descended upon the Earth. First the gods, and then the men that imitated the gods, realized that the bodies of the nymphs were the place of a terrible knowledge, both of salvation and of mourning: a knowledge through possession that could lead to insanity. The paradox of the nymph is that possessing her means being possessed (8).

The Nymphs, according to Roscher (9), are the personification of those filaments and fog banks suspended in the valleys, in the mountains, and the springs, that veil the waters and dance on them. Homer says this is where the nymphs live. However, the most common characterization of the nymph is that of the "girl about to be married" and of the "spring of water". These are meanings that are intertwined: coming close to a nymph means to be taken, to be possessed by something, and to sink into a soft and mobile element that could reveal itself, with equal probability, to be both exciting and mournful.

The Nymphs, young girls of extraordinary beauty, rendered all the more beautiful by floral wreaths and spring flowers, act in the same setting as Pan and the meridian, the privileged hour of Pan's appearances and of his anger. This is also the hour, *par excellence*, of possession by the nymphs.

The stage of the Nymphs is the demoniacal calm of nature, the springs, the river banks, the shadowy caves; the solitary valleys, where they float lightly, chase each other, run, sing, bathe, and lounge on the soft grass or gather flowers.

The meridian is a sacred and dangerous moment in archaic Mediterranean culture. It is the hour when the sun, at its zenith, seems to stop its course, the hour of the attenuation of time; the hour "without air", when "everything is wrapped in a net of light" and, so to speak, buried in it. A moment in which a stick planted in the ground casts its shortest shadow, identifying this immobile hour.

Pan sleeps in the meridian and everything and everyone must rest. In this landscape there is an overwhelming silence, because flowers, trees and animals are rendered mute.

In this rarefied atmosphere, one experiences a completely new feeling of cognitive perception: a numinous feeling. It is a numinousness that is not sublimated, is inarticulated, and is closer to the opaque and dark density of the body than to the dizziness of mystical heights.

Pan's terror expresses one of the moments of numinousness, that of the "*Mysterium Tremendum*", which suddenly appears on the emotional screen, inducing distress and "the feeling of being a creature", faced with its own nothingness, and faced with a terrifying reality brought on by an experience that is beyond fear (10).

The terrifying sound of "*tremendum*" of the experience of panic does not allow the other constituent component of the "*mysterium*", the "*fascinans*" (intended as that which attracts, captivates, and fascinates) to emerge, being, usually, intertwined "in a strange harmony with the repulsive component of "tremendum". Yet, *fascinans* materializes above all in the experience of being possessed by the nymphs, an experience invoked by meeting these "terrible divinities" (as Theocrates said) (11).

In the experience of being possessed by the nymphs, the "*tremendum*" and the "*fascinans*" reappear together: the marvel, the confoundment, and the feeling of being lost, are accompanied by the enchanted and enraptured need to follow the nymphs, to come close and belong to them. The *tremendum* remains hidden in the apparent tameness of their sacred embrace.

The divinity of the wild land, who have an immensely long life yet are not immortal, interweave the relationship with the other sex, a relationship not of love, but one of possession, of violent taking and, at the same time, of rape (12).

In being seduced by the nymphs, not so much in the sense of possession or of prophetic inspiration, but rather, in the sense of ravishment, we can see the moment of the fascinans and of the tremendum.

In the heat and the blinding light of the meridian, the nymphs abduct the most handsome young men, taking them into the depths of the waters, the depths of their aquatic womb, in a beyond, that for those who remain is the embodiment of death.

Many myths tell of the abduction of young men by nymphs; the best known is that of Hylas, the beautiful young lover of Heracles. The story of Hylas was told in the adventures of the Argonauts, where Heracles was pulled forever more into the depths of the pond where he had gone to get water (13).

In this version, Hylas reached the pond at the same moment that a nymph was emerging. The nymph, driven by a violent desire, came close to him and "*rested her neck on his left arm, burning his delicate mouth with her kisses, and with her right arm... dragged him into the pond*." The arm of the nymph that embraces him to kiss him, at the same time, "*makes him sink into the pond*".

In the version of Theocrates (11), there is more than one nymph, and Hylas seems to fall by himself into the water, but even in this case there is a violent reference: "*Since the young man came close to the water with the large urn, in a hurry to steep it, all the nymphs grabbed on to his hand, because all of them felt their tender hearts bursting with the love they felt for the young Greek man. He fell into the water all at once*".

Nonetheless, the episode of Hylas appears, in all its brutality, in a painting by Ercolano (reproduced in a building in Mantova): here three nymphs surround Hylas who is up to his waist in the water, and two of them push his head down. They do not want to embrace him, but rather, to drown him, and submerge him in their waters.

In the myth of Hylas, the appearance of the nymphs is followed by that ravishment. The contact with divinity is followed by the disappearance of the young man, who is strapped from the real world. He is a victim of his own charm, of an attraction that is more than erotic, that the nymphs cannot resist: Hylas is dragged toward nothingness.

The movement of Hylas who leans over the pond is the same as that of Narcissus; like Narcissus, the destiny of Hylas is sealed when he sees his own beautiful image in the surface of the water. Nevertheless, the surface of the water is not smooth, and, unlike that seen by Narcissus, does not reflect his own seductive image. The destiny of Hylas, loved by the nymphs, is different from that of Narcissus, who refuses their love and kills himself by the pond. Water, in these stories, is the element of seduction and repulsion: the division between the depths where the goddesses abduct Hylas and the surface where Narcissus finds himself confronted with himself.

Ovid (14), in the Metamorphosis, tells of the sad destiny of the adolescent, Hermaphrodite, son of Hermes and Aphrodite, after an encounter with the nymph Salmacide at a pond. The nymph was gathering flowers and "*upon seeing the young man, Hermaphrodite, she wanted to possess him*." When Hermaphrodite, who was "*attracted by the tepid waters and caressingly took off his soft clothes from his tender body*", Salmacide was burning "*with the desire for that beautiful nudity*" ...and, casting aside her clothes, "*she threw herself into the water, grasped the young man... and wrapped herself around him like a snake*". She then implored the gods: "*may he never be separated from me*". Her prayer is heard, and the two bodies intertwine and melt, and become amalgamated into a single being.

In the ravishment by the nymphs, an amorous component remains, although it has nothing to do with courteous sentiment, tricks of seduction, the mirage of enticement, or the wait that heightens pleasure. Further, not a trace can be found of the codified rituals of instinctive courtship. Rather, it is a taking of the other, that ends in a never ending embrace that reoccurs whenever a young and handsome man ventures into and loses himself in the light of the meridian, close to the savage places where they live.

The victims of this amorous violence seem to experience an insurmountable ambivalence between feelings of anguish and of desire. In the depths of the waters that welcome them they discern a flash of the promise of happiness, which, aside from causing fear, gives way to a passive availability, and a soft and morbid acquiescence.

In addition to the ravishment of the body, the nymphs can induce a form of inspiration, (the most ancient description of possession by the nymphs), that brings with it the gift of wisdom, divination, and prophetic delirium.

Yet, there is another experience in being possessed by the nymphs. Theocrates called the nymphs *"terrible divinities"*' and the scholiast added: "*terrible because of the fear that overtakes those who encounter them: a fear that makes them possessed by the nymphs"* (11).

In this sense, being possessed by the nymphs neither means being inspired nor ravished, but rather, being stricken by them and driven crazy by the fear instilled in seeing them at a spring. The individual who is a victim of this violent emotion is neither invaded by, nor abducted by the nymphs, but rather stupefied and alienated.

Whether he is inspired, disappears, or goes insane, the man chosen by the nymphs suffers a "*dispossession of the soul*," and thus abandons the real world and is transported in another, a beyond, where he moves outside the limits of life, of light, and becomes an individual distant from culture and the ordinary world, uprooted from the world of the senses to pass on to another existence: he becomes "hieros".

Schmidt (quoted by Callois) (15) tells of a farmer who, drowsing at noon by an isolated spring, was descended upon by the Nereids. When he awoke he was no longer able to walk or to speak, and went insane.

The brief story by Yourcenar, the man who had loved the Nereids (16), seems to make reference to the above. The story tells of young Panegyotis who... "*became mute at eighteen years of age after having seen the nude Nereids,".... The Nereids...innocent and wicked like nature that both protects and destroys man.... It is in them that summer light is incarnated, and that is why seeing them causes dizziness and a state of stupor. They never come out except at the tragic noontime hour, where in the mystery of the day at its height they seem to be submerged...they are beautiful, refreshing, and nefarious nudes like the water one drinks with the germs of the fever; those who have seen them destroy themselves sweetly with languor and desire; those who have had the boldness to come near them become mute for life, so that the secrets of their love is not revealed to the masses*."

Panegyotis, the son of one of the richest farmers of the village is not only mute, he is insane: even Homer, in times past, said that those who had lain with the golden-haired goddesses felt the strength of their minds and bodies vanish.

Everything happened "*one morning in July...when an epidemic broke out among the herd of Panegyotis' father...*(and) *Panegyotis left by himself, at the height the heat, under the hot sun, to look for the veterinarian on the other side of the mountain.... At dusk he had still not returned.... The evening of the next day there was Panegyotis...so transformed that he seemed to have experienced death. His eyes sparkled, but the white of his eyes and his pupils seemed to have devoured his irises...a slightly viscid smile deformed the mouth from which no words could be spoken. He was not, however, completely mute. Certain broken syllables escaped from his lips like the last gurgles of a dying spring. "The Nereids... The Ladies... Beautiful... Naked... Blonde...."*

It is told that he never stopped meeting them, in those hot hours when the demons of the noontime wander, looking for love....

He didn't work anymore, ... roved the country side, avoiding, as much as possible, the bigger roads; wormed his way into the fields and the pine groves, and it is said that a dried jasmine on a brick wall, a white rock at the foot of a cypress, were the messages in which he deciphered the time and the place of the next meeting."

3. In the words of Calasso (8), the ultimate celebration of the nymph is that of Lolita by Nabokov (17). A story about a man possessed by a nymph, Professor Humbert Humbert, the "*enchanted hunter*" who enters the realm of the nymphs chasing a pair of white socks and a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses. Nabokov revealed the reasons for his excruciating and sumptuous homage to the nymphs in the very first pages of the novel, where he explained that: *"It happens at times, that some young girls, between the ages of nine and fourteen, reveal to certain enchanted voyagers – who are twice, or many times more, their age –their own true nature, which is not human, but that of a nymph (that is, demoniacal)"*.

Nabokov describes "*the arcane grace, the elusive, changeable, insidious and excruciating fascination (charm), that distinguishes the little nymph from the many girls of her own age*". Yet only some, *"artists and mad men, creatures of infinite melancholia... can discern at first sight, thanks to ineffable signals – the imperceptibly feline profile of a cheek bone, the slenderness of a leg lightly covered with down, and other clues... of the*

nymph demon..., the immortal demon disguised as a little girl...".

Humbert Humbert will lose himself to Lolita, to this "immortal demon disguised as a little girl," and the scene of his perdition is the "heartbreakingly beautiful" regions of America. It is an America that they cross in a furious way, from one motel of the Mid West to the next, an America only seen by the eyes of Edward Hopper (18)

Humbert Humbert will lose Lolita, and will only find her again after three years. He will find a different Lolita: pregnant, married, and buried in the mountain of flesh that is the destiny of all little nymphs in the end. It is only a "*weak smell of violets, the echo of dead leaves*", that remind him of the little nymph, the "garden and the twilight", the veiled and adorable regions in her that Humbert will never reach again (18).

The ending of the story is but a grotesque, squalid, and desperate battle with the alter ego that has taken her from him.

4. The western culture of the 19th and 20th Century is populated with illustrious "nimpholeptoi"; just to offer some examples: Aby Warburg, Martin Heidegger, Carl Gustav Jung, Henrik Ibsen, Emil Cioran.

In all of them, the possession by the nymphs took on different and hybrid forms, but was at the same time true to the myth. They all had intellectual fervour, in addition Warburg had insanity, Heidegger and Jung had rapacious egotism and Ibsen and Cioran experienced a metamorphosis of their *Weltanshaung*. Nonetheless, all of them, when encountering a nymph, left behind the shreds of their multifaceted identity and allowed one to glimpse the muddy depths and the "heart of darkness" of their souls.

Aby Warburg (8, 19), in the period (1898-1902) when he lived in Florence, planned a correspondence with a Dutch friend, Andre Jollas, having as a theme the young girl who carries a basket of fruit in the Birth of John the Baptist by Ghirlandaio at Santa Maria Novella. A fine thread ran through the plot: the amorous passion of Jollas for this very beautiful girl, with undulating clothing and a light step. *"I have lost my mind,"* Jollas wrote, but the one who was speaking was Warburg.

In the first letter this meeting is described:

"*Right near the open door she runs, but no!, flies or rather hovers, the object of my dreams, that little by little assumes the proportions of a pleasant nightmare. Who is coming into the room? A figure of my imagination, but no!, a maidservant, but no!, a classic nymph, with her veil that swells and flutters... This stately, vivacious and light walk, so rich with movement, this energetic and irresistible gait...At times it seems to me that this maidservant does not run on the ground, but rather crosses it with winged feet of luminous ether. Well, I have left my heart there and in the agitated days that followed, I saw her everywhere...I have lost my mind....*"

In this mobile and disquieting figure of Ghirlandaio, that seems to come out of the affresco, he sees a *"pagan goddess in exile"*, a nymph that has crossed the centuries unharmed and has entered the austerity of a Florentine room to blow her *brise imaginaire* (8, 19).

Jollas alias Warburg, on first impact, recognized the seductive power of the nymph, and it was only years later that he realized that a sinister and terrifying variant of this enchanting figure existed: that of the "head huntress" (Judith, Salomè, the Maenads), and Warburg became aware that he could be overtaken by the nymphs and by insanity.

In fact, in 1918 the psychological health of Warburg, modern nympholeptos, is lost: phobias, obsessions and hallucinations take hold of him and he is hospitalised at Kreuzlingen (from 1920 to 1924) in Binswanger's clinic. "*The demons whose domain he had tried to explore in the story of humanity got their revenge by capturing him*" (19).

Andrè Jollas, alias Warburg, was not the only one to be seduced by the image of a nymph. At about the same time, it happened to Norbert Hanold, the main character in Gradiva, a brief novel by Wilhelm Jensen (20), which became famous because of the renowned commentary by Freud (21).

Like the nymph of Jollas, the beloved figure of Hanold (a bas relief at the Vatican Museum) is shown while walking ("*With her head tilted back slightly, she gathered the ample gown that fell from her shoulders to her ankles... The left foot was forward, and the right foot that was about to follow barely touched the ground with the toes.... This gliding almost into flight, along with the as-*

surance of the stately walk, gave the image its specific grace").

Movement is the essence of the young girl, and that is why Hanold called her Gradiva, *"the one who advances"*. He acquired a cast in plaster that he hung in his study, between the bookshelves filled with books. Freud repeats the gesture, hanging the cast of Gradiva above the famous couch in his study in Berggasse.

Like Jollas, Hanold loses his mind because of this image. In a letter to Freud, who was trying to understand to what extent the story was autobiographical, Jensen answered that the idea came to him because of the impression the old bas relief provoked in him *("I imagined her while walking across those stones of... Pompeii, that I had come to know well during my repeated and prolonged trips to the digs... In the hot and sunny solitude, I approached more and more that limit where vigil vision with the eyes becomes transformed into a purely mental vision. This state, which I myself have in some way experienced, allowed me to later describe that of Norbert Hanold")* (22).

Hence, Jensen, as well (like Hanold and Jollas) experienced the seductive fascination of the pagan image, to the point of losing his mind.

Martin Heidegger, *"the king in the realm of thought"* met, in the winter of 1924, *a "sylvan nymph"*, the young Russian Jew Hannah Arendt (7).

Hannah, seventeen, beautiful and elegant, coming from the Koenigsberg of Immanuel Kant, arrived at the Faculty of Marburg to study Philosophy with the already famous Professor Heidegger, with *"the secret king of thought"*. The "*luminous, dreaming, dark, absent, calm yet somehow disquieting eyes"* of Hannah for two months exchanged glances with Heidegger while he spoke from the podium and Heidegger was seduced by those eyes and by the *"demoniac force"* of that *"sylvan nymph"*. With a letter, defined by Magris (7) as being "*unctuous and falsely profound"*, he started to seduce his seventeen-year-old student praising her intelligence and soul. "*The concreteness*", to use a delicious expression coined by Ursula Ludz (23)indicating the consummation, takes place shortly thereafter (February, 1925). This phase of erotic enchantment coincides with the genesis of *Sein und Zeit*.

The student falls in love, and the Professor accepts her love, but does not fall in love and the erotic experience, although intense, does not graze his life, his methodical bourgeois habits, or the rigid stability of his family and academic life.

Heidegger dictates the rules of a relationship that is undertaken in the secrecy and small bourgeoisie of academic clandestinity that continuously humiliate her desire: secret meetings, subterfuges, and hidden agreements. Heidegger's messages were to be immediately destroyed, and the place and time of meetings were indicated by agreed upon signals. Hannah could come to his study depending on whether or not the light was on. When they met in small out of the way inns she was to take a streetcar that did not leave immediately after his.

The relationship lasted until 1928. Heidegger left her and she was destroyed by it. In 1933, Hannah watched incredulous as the master was transformed into a "*man of the nazi system*". At that point, the two lovers go separate ways. Arendt immigrates to the United States in 1941 and it was only at the end of the war that she returned to Europe.

On February 6th, 1950 at a conference in Freiburg they see each other again and he leaves a letter at the hotel where she is staying. They spend the night together in Arendt's hotel and in the light of dawn Heidegger admits "*the guilt of his own silence*": it is not clear whether he is referring to his own silence regarding Nazism, or in relationship to the woman who loves him. In any event, their love is rekindled, yet he is once again the one to impose the conditions: Hannah had to become friends with his wife, and the more platonic meetings were to take place between the three of them. Thus began an authentic comedy, an ambiguous *ménage a trois* where both the wife and the lover had their place in a devotional orbit. In addition, the two women didn't like each other: Elfride was severe and proudly anti-Semitic and couldn't bear Hannah's cigar smoke, and Hannah considered her a "*mortally stupid woman*".

The *liaison,* modulated by the philosophical correspondence and by the distance and rarity of the meetings, continued until 1975, the year when Arendt died (December 4th). A few months later, (May 26th, 1976) Heidegger also died.

Yet another example is that of the seduction of Carl Gustav Jung by the nymph Sabina Spielrein.

This event, described also in the correspondence between Jung, Freud, and Spielrein, was revealed to the international scientific community in the book *Diario di una segreta simmetria* by Carotenuto (24)and was shown to the public at large in the movie *Prendimi l'anima* by Faenza (25).

Sabina, daughter of cultured and wealthy Russian Jews, suffered in adolescence from a disorder considered by some to be of the schizophrenic type, and by others to be a severe case of hysteria with schizoid traits. In August 1904, her parents had her hospitalised at the Burgholzli Psychiatric Hospital of Zurich, headed by Bleuler where Jung also worked. Jung continued to treat her even after she left the hospital in 1905 to study medicine.

Sabina loved Jung with the intensity that a young woman loves her first love, in whom she also saw her saviour from insanity; in addition, Jung had introduced her to the study of psychopathology, which was his work. Her affection for him did not even falter when her feelings were betrayed by Jung, who behaved towards her with what he himself defined as baseness.

Spielrein had an extraordinary influence on the thought of Jung and her contribution led to the development of the concept of Anima and Shadow.

The epistolary documents provide evidence that the relationship was clearly sexual (*poetry* is the term that Spielrein used to indicate the sexual act), and that the behavior of Jung, in the words of Bettelheim, was scandalous and rogueish when (in March, 1909) their relationship became known. Someone, maybe Jung's wife, wrote an anonymous letter to Spielrein's mother informing her of the relationship and asking her to end it.

In response to the letter written by the mother, Jung stated that he had felt authorized to abandon "*the role of doctor*" with the daughter "*not having ever expected to be paid a fee*", and added that he would have respected his role as a doctor in the future "*as the mother wanted*" if "*an adequate fee*" were established for his services.

It may be the fear of scandal that led Jung to resign from Burghozli.

Spielrein's mother threatened to appeal to Bleuler, but finally, as these things usually end up (mothers are expert in understanding and minimizing the sexual affairs of their daughters), after a few weeks everything was resolved and the relationship between Jung and Spielrein could continue.

Another example is that of the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen and the adolescent Emilie Bardach (7).

"*One day youth will come knocking on my door, and that will be the end of builder Solness*" he states of himself in the play by the same name by Ibsen (26) which marked (in 1892) a turning point in the work of the Norwegian writer.

Youth and that anarchic demon of erotic desire that Solness feels coming is the very young and savage Hilde who knocks on Solness' door just as he utters these words.

With builder Solness, Ibsen abandons the ethical, ideological and social commitment of his work to turn to the tragic game of instincts and the depths of beings where the tumult is beyond good and evil and beyond rational and moral volition (7).

Until his incipient old age, Ibsen held himself forth as a writer of Socratic rationality and affirmed the dominion of the individual over nature, with the negation of the seductions of life and the subordination of love to the realization of higher duties. Ibsen's maturity and old age, however, are permeated by a nostalgia for the Dionysian flow of life, and the distressing recall of the world and of neglected carnality. The characters of his last plays suffer from the regret of not having lived their lives, of having held back and of having sacrificed them for the sake of goals which were only apparently superior (art, work, morals), and which in reality neither justify nor give meaning to life but rather, suffocate it.

Hilde's character is based on a real female individual, who may have been Ibsen's only true passion, an inner storm that was at the same time respectful and chaste. The model for Hilde is Emilie Bardach, an eighteen-year-old Viennese girl whom Ibsen, at age sixty-one, met and spent time with in August and September of 1889, while staying at Gossensass in Tyrol, today known as Colle Inarco.

Emilie's diary, as well as her letters, attest to the touching innocence of their passion, and its intertwining of demoniacal restlessness, defenseless torment, and respectful regard. Ibsen is profoundly overcome

with a passion he has never known before, yet never oversteps the limits of decorum and respect (7).

Emilie, the "*seductive, fascinating and delicious*" Viennese girl, a being of the season of butterflies and wild flowers, stays in the imagination of Ibsen as a symbol of the life never lived, and is reborn in certain poetic figures in his work.

Even the old, skeptic, disenchanted, melancholic, lucid iconoclast Cioran, met his nymph in the guise of Friedgard Thoma, a young German teacher of philosophy (27). Friedgard described her admiration for the seventy-year old philosopher-writer in a letter, who then responded, and only a few weeks later Friedgard and the old thinker walked around Paris hand in hand. It is the birth of an impossible love story; of a passion that, as Cioran had written not long before, could not avoid being a sin *"against the true weight of being and things"* (27).

The story was made public in Um nichts in der welt. Eine liebe von Cioran, whose title recalls a phrase by Colette that Cioran wrote for the young lover on a napkin in a Parisian restaurant. *Pour rien au monde,* "*For nothing in the world would I give up the lyrical and vagabond use of my late autumn*". Thus an inebriating, illusory, and fatal love story is born, where Cioran tasted the youth of Friedgard and the "*perverse attraction for her body*". He forgot having written "*Time has vanished from my blood; they supported each other like in a symphony: now that they have both dried up, is it surprising that nothing else will become?*". How he forgot his aphorisms where he had poured all of his disenchantment, his boredom with life, his nausea and obsession with suicide. Cioran lets himself be overcome with an erotic and devouring passion that makes him say "*I want to bury my head forever under your skirts*" and *"You are...the goddess of one who believes in nothing"*. Friedgard gave herself (as is befitting a goddess), with detached wisdom (again, as is befitting a goddess), and without losing sight of the cynical reality of a pitiful and unsurmountable ontological difference (as is also befitting common mortals). The relationship (as in a stereotype already seen) becomes triangular because of Friedgard, but the epilogue bears the seal of Cioran's pessimism: Cioran becomes demented (loses his mind) and spends the last years of his life in a nursing home unable to ask himself, as he had in the past, if he would ever have *"once tasted the lymph of things"* and what *"flavor"* it would have. Not long after the death of Cioran, his wife Simone commits suicide by drowning and Friedgard can thus narrate yet another daily human event (27).

5. In Tiberius' times, as Plutarch tells (28), a ship sailing along the coast of the Aegean Sea, stopped suddenly due to a sudden drop in the wind. The sails went limp and the water became immobile. A voice sounded from afar calling Tamus, the helmsman, and said to him: "*When your ship is in front of the mountain full of pine trees, you must yell: The great Pan is dead!*". As soon as the helmsman yelled the message, a long shudder, like a great moan, went through the Earth, and men and animals were overcome with a panic fear, as if they had witnessed a tragic and obscure event.

With the death of Pan the nymphs died as well. Pan and the nymphs did not die, they found exile in the minds of men where they have however continued to live and act, sharing the same interior landscape and living together in our dreams, in our fantasies, and in our passions. Pan is in every nymph, and in every Pan there is a nymph. Every time that goat-like impulses and fantasies erupt, it is Pan who has been summoned by a nymph, and every time that we meet a nymph we are tempted by Pan, tempted by our primitive and brutal sexuality and, like with the nymph, we try to escape from it, to distance ourselves, and to reflect on and elaborate it.

In the panic world of the nymphs, love does not reside, but rather the hunt, the violence, the ravishment and the rape. The panic world of the nymphs is not that of Eros, but that of brute sexuality and fear (29). As Mallarmè states, *"if the gods don't do anything unfavorable, it means they are no longer gods"* (30).

The panic world of the nymphs, however, is also the world of seduction, of nostalgia, of sublimation, of symbolic elaboration, and of creativity.

As the myth of the nymph Syrinx tells (14), to escape from Pan, she "*begged her aquatic sisters to transform her*", and since "*Pan thought he had already caught her he, in the place of the body of the nymph, tightened a tassel of ditch reed...and fixed some straws of unequal length with wax giving the name of the young girl to the instrument...Syrinx*". His beloved Syrinx had been transformed into the melodious instrument of his nostalgia.

"This way I will stay with you", Pan says. These words embody his metamorphosis, and his ability to give up the possession of the object, for its symbolic substitute that bears only the name of the real object.

The disquieting and erotic melody, lugubrious and fascinating, that is born from the breath that blows through the ditch reeds of the river in Pan's flute, is none other than memory and nostalgia: the memory and the nostalgia of the sighs of the nymphs, of the flight and the breathless chase in the ditch reeds, and of the pleasure of the embraces dreamed of on the river banks.

It is memory and nostalgia; memory and nostalgia of an unreachable object. In fact, seduction presupposes a distance that cannot be bridged. Seduction is a way of attracting, of bringing closer, but at the same time in the words of Nietzsche, of bringing closer while driving away. It is a strange oxymoron: seduction as in *ducere ad se* and seduction as se(d)-ducere, leading astray and leading away. The nymphs attract, yet lead astray, when they pass, disappearing like the white foam on the ocean, to again quote Nietzsche (31). They escape, vanish, and go beyond. The movement of escape, in emanating the power of enchantment, is liberated. They seduce because they do not remain, and because the encounter can never take place. The memory of the never having been remains, the memory of a vague promise that could not be kept, the memory of an allusive and elusive game, a game of the undefined, of the vagueness of the shadows, of lost time, with the illusion of having found time again.

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Correspondence: Prof. Carlo Maggini
Neuroscience Deparment, Unit of Psychiatry
University of Parma
P. le Matteotti - 43100 Parma, Italy
Tel. +39 0521 206561
Fax +39 0521 230611
E-mail: carlo.maggini@unipr.it; www.actabiomedica.it