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List of Contents

This issue launched a major special project:

- Iliyana Nedkova** The Contemporary Myth of Women Artists
in Erica Jong's Novel *Any Woman's Blues*(1990) 4
- Mary S.Duffy** Subject(ed) to Desire : Representations of
the Diseased as Norm 81
- Maria Elena Buzek** War Goddess: The Varga Girls, WWII
and Feminism 89
- Angelika Beckmann** Das Zentrum für Kunst und Medien
Technologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Deutschland Überlegungen
zu ausgewählten Werken von Künstlerinnen im Museum
für Neue Kunst und im Medienmuseum 101
- Diary of an Ageing Art Slut 121

The Contemporary Myth of Women Artists in Erica Jong's Novel *Any Woman's Blues*(1990)

Iliyana Nedkova

This research project examines the professional, social, personal and sexual identity of women artists in the late 1980s through a fictional character - Leila Sand - the protagonist in one of Erica Jong's latest novels *Any Woman's Blues*. The research employs the powerful 'tools' of textual analysis, deconstruction and interpretation in its attempt to dismantle the contemporary myths of womanhood. The text argues that creativity is available to women in the fin-de-siecle but yet there is still an outrageous price to be paid in the 'obstacle race' of the art world. Erica Jong's woman artist is caught in a transitional period of American culture when the myth of the eternal woman is no longer valid but the new patterns of the contemporary myth are gaining momentum.

Initially this web-text was my MA Thesis in English, American and Cultural Studies, Sofia University, Bulgaria.

I would like to believe that this web-of-words will stir up an on-line discussion and perhaps explore various new issues

- * Introduction
- * Thesis
- * The Popular Myth of the Eternal Woman
- * On Women Artists in General Other Major Sections:-
- * Women Artists' Personal Identity
- * Women Artists' Sexual Identity
- * Women Artists' Social Identity
- * Women Artists' Professional Identity
- * Conclusions
- * Bibliography

Introduction

One of the reinforced prejudices of our contemporary culture is the tendency to stereotype the sexes, to see male and female as separate opposed beings instead of in terms of the human qualities we all possess. From our current vantage point the eternal balance of the world is represented in a display of the patriarchal hierarchy and the dominance of a rational model of the world. In this model, men are presumed superior to women and thus are automatically entitled to spiritual creation. Male creativity is taken for granted and further more supported. And within this same picture of the world women are presumed inferior. Spiritual creation is denied to them and any woman has to pay dearly if she dares to aspire dauntingly to creation.

There are social and historical reasons for the patriarchy to rank first the man rather than the woman. The Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution empowered Man as master and creator of the world. An ideal of the self-sufficient man was initiated - the male came to represent the rule (the norm), rather than the woman.

Today, Feminism tries to establish the place of the woman as a master of the world as well. These practical and theoretical efforts are analogous to the revolutionary endeavour of the Renaissance. But Feminism confronts the huge backlash of the years of patriarchal and sexist thinking, prejudices and female inertia. Yet there are reasons of social and psychological nature that are quite unsolvable by Feminism - neither society nor men who are good fathers are able to take up the role of the mother in childbirth and the raising of children.

In this project, I will try to hypothesize further about seeing the world in the new perspective which feminism has created and find out whether it is fruitful to debase the basic social pillar of this hierarchy. Perhaps these speculations will lead us to the apocalyptic vision of all women as lesbians and all men as gays which will virtually end reproduction and drive the world to a dead end. Feminists, who claim to be different from lesbians, also enter into acute clash with men as patriarchs yet it often seems as if they tend to imitate men in their lifestyle as if struggling to become surrogate men. Thus women try to ban and erase all the ideas of an eternal womanhood.

But is there an eternal man and an eternal woman? Is the Renaissance man or the Feminist woman able to embody the craving of humankind for harmony? Perhaps the answer is in compromise between the two general characteristics male/female. The masculine and the feminine, the Yin and Yang qualities are discernible in every person, regardless of his/her sex. This compromise could be perceived as the chaos in its positive revelation, the complexity, dynamics or ambivalence of human nature, or cooperation as a break in the spiral of power.

This compromise also makes use of this duality whenever the social environment is friendly and allows for the woman to have both her motherhood and the life of her mind, to be a passionate scholar and a passionate mother at once. Perhaps with the close of the twentieth century we will be able to see the birth of a new myth of

contemporary woman. Perhaps the specific rendering of Erica Jong's woman of the late 1980s will be able to give us an insight into the developing myth of women caught in the process of emancipation.

However I will argue that to create life is not woman's sole creative occupation. I am challenging the assumption that a woman by nature and biological determination is an artist only in her daily life, that she is permitted no further yearnings to create. The woman of the late 1980s, that is the major concern of this paper and of Erica Jong's in her recent novel *Any Woman's Blues* (1990)[Jong 1991] could hardly enjoy the traditional opposition nature-women versus culture-men.

Creativity is available to women in the 1980-1990s but that there is still an outrageous price to be paid. We can see the metaphoric image of this price in Bessie Smith's song *Any Woman's Blues* which Erica Jong deliberately highlights as a title of her book about a fictional woman artist, Leila Sand. We could adopt the image of Germaine Greer's *Obstacle Race* [Greer 1979], as this was the name she chose for this price in her book about women painters. I am concerned here with this racing against all odds, and the damage, and the blues of the discouraging mythologies and paradigms for so many would-be women artists and poets. I argue that the experience of the blues and the outcome of this obstacle race bring us to a new myth of the contemporary woman. I am interested to find out how this new myth is related to the woman artist in particular.

I therefore try to compare the popular myth of the eternal woman with the specific identity of the woman in Erica Jong's novel. Thus we will venture into the historically variable and site specific myth of the woman artist. I am concerned with this myth as one which is valid for America from the 1970s up until early nineties and which Erica Jong is re-creating through her protagonist Leila Sand.

It will be useful to start from the assumption that the American woman as discussed by Jong is distinct. She is much too much of a pioneer, working on her own, carrying many responsibilities on her shoulders since the rise of the American nation. The American woman also experiences the immediate impact of Feminism from the early sixties onwards in her native country. One of the possible consequences of this is the acute self-awareness in the American woman of her creative energy, of her artistic self. This local breakthrough gains universal meaning in the concept of women artists which Jong develops and accounts for the emergence of a new myth.

My approach will be to find out the components, the attributes i.e. the mythologemas of the women artists myth as depicted in the story of Leila Sand. In this thesis I collect the motifs and images in the book that are support the myth. To make it more comprehensible I offer an approach to Leila Sand through her identity - personal, sexual, social and professional. Then I draw together all the motifs that build up the mythological framework of women artists. Through the textual analysis, interpretation and deconstruction we eventually find out that women artists' identity

is unstable, ambivalent and definitely creative. I argue we could all probably share the narrator's perception of the woman artist as an inconsistent, split self set on a 'roller-coaster ride' and question the ongoing social claims about women's unambivalent nature and the popular myth of the eternal woman. Thus I try to make a final statement in the search of women artists' selfhood and argue or rather agree with Caryl Fleishman-Stanger that *Any Woman's Blues* 'has as its theme a woman's search for a way out of addictive love and toward real self-love, which is not to be confused with narcissism.' [Stanger 1991] We must be clear that Erica Jong oeuvre as a whole hasn't been thoroughly studied yet. Neither has her latest novel been scrutinised from the mythological perspective of the women artists. Though Caryl Fleishmann-Stanger, PhD claims to be the 'editor, the official biographer, and literary executor to so feminal a writer of our time'. There is however just a brief foreword by her to *Any Woman's Blues*. Since there are hardly any books that deal concretely with Erica Jong's novel, this survey will be based mainly on the text itself [Jong 1991] and on her autobiography *Fear of Fifty* [Jong 1994/a]- as the most relevant comprehensive self-study. Some effective references will be made back to her earlier novels *Fear of Flying* [Jong 1973] and *How to Save Your Own Life* [Jong 1977] and to her book on Henry Miller *The Devil at Large* [Jong 1992].

The popular myth of the eternal woman

Conventional femininity is a complex of culturally designated passive qualities that reinforce and do not disturb man's concept of what woman is: namely, that she should be modest, gentle, delicate, docile. The essentials of female femininity are beauty and sexuality but desirable femininity rests on the idea that a woman is also young and innocent as well as sensual, lustful, voluptuous, passionate in order that she is always desired. In this model, she is also the mother running the family and raising the children. Within the family she is a homebound housewife, a cook and a maid, doing the chores, a person with no public exposure. As a wife she is loving, caring, faithful, devoted to flattering and approving of her husband's doings. Her love and her husband are central into her life. Woman's social role is that of the non-demanding passive consumer, someone who does not question the patriarchal status-quo. She is characterised as the weak being that comes second as *the second sex* [Beauvoir 1949]. In these terms, the eternal woman is neither business-like nor a money-maker. She is represented as an apolitical and marginal figure, someone underpaid, unemployed and deprived of power.

The eternal woman also fits into the ancient categories of good/bad girl. This opposition has hoary literary history. One part of this stereotype is reflected in the dichotomy between blonde and brunette: the blonde is presumed to be 'good as gold' - i.e. self-confident; by contrast, the dark sultry siren is doomed everlastingly as a bad girl. The bad girl is also associated with the woman as a witch, mad or hysterical or a prostitute.

From a mythological perspective, this myth of an eternal woman has also been associated with nature, earth, darkness, negative, moon, water, fertility, mother goddess, life and death. Woman's power to create life was not considered relevant for the mythological thinking needed to create art. In this text, I consider, however, the promotion of the woman's abilities to create books, paintings, art objects, performances as well as babies as the main feature of our contemporary myth.

On women artists in general

Women artists are rarely exploited as key characters in literature. The last 20 years have seen an enormous amount of revelatory work in art criticism, rather than in fiction on women artists between the 18th and 20th centuries. Despite the art world's pride in progressive thinking art history moves slowly: it took a long time before a major reevaluation of entrenched attitudes towards women artists gained momentum. The galvanising event for many was the publication of the distinguished art historian Linda Nochlin's seminal essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?' (1971). Although opposed to the ways in which the lone male genius has been mythologised, Nochlin is in favour of developing research upon the women artists who have been consigned to the shadow of history, as long as they are put in the context of their time: 'And we are certainly finding there are many more important women painters than we once thought.' [Nochlin 1971] But despite the increased scholarly, curatorial, market and popular interest the fictional, narrative world of women artists is barely nascent. We can only speculate that women artists are going to be much written about and acknowledged in current literature with the ever growing interest in their historical visibility. This does not mean canonical studies are not important but the present rise in women's stories and autobiographies indicates that there is a terrible potential for women artists to 'impose' their own subjectivity in the narratives [Slapsak 1995], often without due attention to research.

Women artists today are still discriminated against as are women in virtually every area of contemporary American society. Women still earn less than two-thirds as much as men do, they own less than one percent of the property in this country, and they constitute the smallest minority in the government at large. Yet, even in the arts, women have not achieved as much as has been claimed. The larger statistics still tell the same story: in terms of museum and gallery representation, sales, major articles, important grants, commissions, and tenured teaching positions, and in many areas women artists do not seem comparably better off today than in 1970.

Part of the reason that so little substantive change has taken place is that once again we are living in a politically conservative climate. In the 1970s many American women 'cleaned house', reordering priorities and relationships in a struggle to achieve power and autonomy in the home, the workplace, and the political sphere. Early feminists felt victimized by the authority and power of an entrenched patriarchy and reacted against *the enemy* with a moral fervour comparable with

that of the civil rights and antiwar activities of the 1960s. This is why the early women's movement is now viewed as all practice and no theory. [Tucker 1989]

Today, with the exception of a few individuals and an occasional group effort (like that of the Guerrilla Girls), most feminist efforts now appear to take place in criticism and theory. No wonder that Erica Jong seems to follow consistently this critical and theorizing mode of expression in her narrative, which allows her to be very perceptive about the situation of contemporary women artists.

Perhaps it is also an effect of postmodernism today, with its emphasis on the problems of marginalisation in general, that has helped us to think not in simple dichotomies of right and wrong, male and female, dominant and dominated, but in terms of how discourse operates in a way which precludes such polarization and instead raises issues of hegemony and difference - cultural, racial, and sexual, among others. Although more women are visible now than in 1970, and while the rare woman artist (without exception white) may even be highly visible, practice and theory - in the arts as elsewhere - have to meet more closely in our century to provide the equity that might lead to real social change. Contemporary women's culture still needs to be a consistent fight for redefining, rethinking and destroying stereotypes and myths about women. Unfortunately the wheel metaphor which Erica Jong applies to this issue is still valid:

A woman writer must not only invent the wheel, she must grow the tree and chop it down, whittle it round, and learn to make it roll. Then she must clear a path for herself. [Jong 1994/a]

This is not an exaggeration in respect of the price of the female creativity. In a patriarchal society, that rushes, with astonishing rapidity, into conservatism and into the resurrection of traditional roles, feminism keeps getting buried. It then has to be rediscovered as if for the first time. The whole history of English poetry, for example, stressed man as creator and woman as nature. From Shakespeare to Wordsworth to Yeats and Graves, male poets ploughed female Nature into a seemingly androgynous fruition. The female was the muse and muses were supposed to be silent. While a man who writes is not automatically considered a usurper. A male writer surely has to find his voice, but does he also have to first convince the world that he should have a right to find his voice?

A creative woman could be compared to a hunted Jew, eternally positioned as the outsider. She is asked first to disguise her sex, change her name, blend into the approved art of male supremacy. People who suffer discrimination make up new names (so does Leila Sand), bleach their skin, bob their noses, deny who they are in order to survive. As a consequence many women still make literature in the mode that men consider important. Hence the literary focus on 'love', because in any love relationship men are at the centre and they do not like to be reminded that there is any other part of a woman's life in which they are not central. I was therefore interested to find out how her personal and sexual life affects Leila Sand and her creative aspirations in order to compile the profile of the contemporary women artists myth.

Women Artists' Personal Identity

We can now touch upon something that has always concerned Erica Jong - the issue of the protagonist's 'I' as this is perhaps not the 'I' that narrates the story in the first person singular. Every character of the book, as in every book, is part of that mysterious mosaic we call the protagonist's 'self'. The problem of women artists' personal identity in Erica Jong's narrative reflects a complex weaving of specific and general issues. Here we will try to dismantle one of the most central ones - the woman artist as a *wunderkind*; as a self-made person and someone who is outside social mores, and a drug/drink addict. Below I consider this idea in relation to her age and name, as well as her sane mind. My aim is to find out how they are integrated in the contemporary myth of women artists.

The *wunderkind* background of Leila Sand

Erica Jong's latest novel is definitely preoccupied with 'Her Mythological Highness the Artist'. By shifting the setting of the story from the usual world of books to the fine arts world, Erica Jong creates her central character as an established artist, Leila Sand. However the emphasis is not on the growing up of the character as is common in a bildungsroman or as James Joyce did in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916 [Joyce 1992] focus on the adolescence and youth of Stephen Daedalus. Instead she looks back at her past. In *Any Woman's Blues* there are just a few occasional remarks on the 'mythic old days'- the family and educational background - but these are all conveyed from the perspective of the 'swollen ego' of the celebrated artist. Leila's brief account of her youth brings to the front her early recognized 'prodigious talent':

I was treated like the Wunderkind of the Western world...By the time I took the test for Music and Art, when I was twelve, I was a better artist than most of my teachers and they knew it. The oohing and aahing over my portfolio was fierce. (p.50,1/III)

The semantic ramifications over her prodigious talents highlight Leila's extraordinary and enormous gift of a wunderkind. Moreover Leila proves to excel not only above the children of her own age but also the abilities of her tutors. The exaggerated celebration of her phenomenal talent results in a cluster of words of praise. The stormy applause of her early works is referred to as fierce, which later in the text will denote her fierce self as a woman artist. The air of something brutal and barbarous in her fierce will further stresses the tremendous and astonishing gifts of Leila. One is likely to think that Leila's inborn gifts are worthy of a genius but throughout the text this is a taboo-word for a woman artist. The irony of it, picked up by Erica Jong, is that in spite of being treated like a genius, Leila is not allowed to consider herself like one. The bitter undertone of 'oohing and aahing' is somehow exposing the cunning nature of those who approve of her art yet work to deprive her of any further success.

In terms of her inherited self Leila believes that her art is something entirely inborn: artists are not taught but merely grow into their real selves if their real selves are not blocked. In search of her real self Leila will controversially credit her success both to her heritage and her self-made nature. Her immense skills in making things Leila attributes to her father - for her craftsman's hands and for her eye that 'could immediately see the right juxtaposition of shapes and colors'. Yet she seems to take on the 'crazed bravado' - this notion that she can do anything - from her mother. Although the account of her life with her parents is restricted to half a chapter we are strongly convinced that Leila is as much her father's and mother's daughter as her own creation. Her inherited bravado is of huge value to Leila and it is a feature that very much relates her to the rest of Jong's heroines. It is no longer perceived as a pretentious, swaggering display of courage but as the gift that a woman artist needs most so as to fulfill her dreams. Equipped with her bravado and her humour she can face and fight the hostility of the world. Her bravado may border on madness but in a strange way it can fire her ambition for creativity.

The exemptness of Leila Sand

We can also detect some of the *evergreen* claims of Romanticism in this artist as Leila Sand is depicted as a deviant or extraordinary person, someone privileged and excluded from the ordinary people. In her self-definition, she as a woman artist is not like other women. She has 'always thought herself exempt to the fate of most women' (p.64/III). However there are moments when she begins to feel like a victim, and then like most other women. Yet her identity as an artist is enough for her to distinguish herself from the rest of the world. Her prevailing style in speaking of her self is 'always' and 'never' like other people:

Is this where my life will take me - to a church basement, listening to platitudes.

I am an artist. My life has never been like the other people's. 96/VI

The 12 cliches, or rules, of the Anonymous Alcoholics Meetings become platitudes which seem to apply to everybody else but Leila. We are made to hear even her mother's voice saying: 'Louise, you always think the rules that apply to other people don't apply to you' (p. 84/V). However Leila's sane mind is nowhere in sight to argue her case for this statement and hence we are led to believe that the woman artist is a rare character, immune to the ordinary buzz and bustle of life. Moreover this lady artist is convinced that God is also involved in her elected, elevated being, and that God had put her there for a purpose. She had merely to honour the praising breath within her and to carry it forward into the universe. To destroy it or to deny her unique status, would be 'great a heresy as destroying her paintings or strangling her twins' (135,6/VIII). In a strange way through this blasphemous simile of heresy we are to deal with the positive notion of woman artist that life is a supreme gift, and that her life has been given to her. She had only to say yes to the gift. This is a great life in which paintings, children and breath are equally cherished. Yet it takes

more courage to lead a great life. It's not easy to do what Leila Sand has undertaken. Sybille, Leila's shrink, appropriates Leila's sane mind, once again foregrounding the enormous creative merits of women artists and their chances to survive and achieve in our contemporary world.

Leila, you are singled out somehow to make pictures of the world. In another age, you'd be dead in childbirth, you'd be stoned as a witch. You are given a rare talent. All you have to do is protect it - even when you least want to. (219/XIII)

Protecting her artistic self seems to be very hard job for Leila who is aware that she is her own guardian angel. There is no one around to protect her but her own sane mind. Perhaps that is why her identity is so fragile and vulnerable.

Women artists as self-made persons

Leila's personal identity is that of a self-made artist. We need to go back to the MA years of Leila to realize how it all began. It was then when she changed her name from Louise Zandberg to Leila Sand to her father's horror and her mother's delight - George Sand was one of her mother's heroines - p.52/II. This is certainly a convincing move in terms of the dynamics of her self-styled individuality as an artist and allies itself to the myth of the American dream of a self-made prospering people. From this point on Leila is 'pissed off' if someone gives away her original name (let alone to a famous art dealer) as happens later - p.56/II.

What is also relevant for Leila's search of selfhood is her deliberate choice of George Sand's name. The reader might be struck that Erica Jong hasn't picked up not the name of a lady artist for Leila but that of a writer. However the room for parallels between George and Leila Sand are vast though they are always left implicitly in the text. For instance, Leila's way of managing her career like a man is evident in the male pseudonym George Sand took for her first name. Leila also act like a poet and writer trying to share and follow the life of such a pioneering woman-of-letters. On the other hand Erica Jong seems to credit George Sand's bravado in being the first woman who dared to pursue both her literary and sexual aspirations. Leila needs such a role model, to step in the tracks of a kindred being and to get a firm sense of the tradition embodied by the myth of George Sand, in order to take it even further in our time. [Hadgikosev 1984]

Leila Sand's 'self-portraits' are also of interest as a clue to her self-assertiveness as an artist. Leila's face becomes a simile - a key through which to enter the fine arts domain: 'My face is like my palette. I know every inch of it - every enlarged pore, every birthmark, every sag of a skin, every discoloration'. [p. 87/VI]

And the words go on mixing and painting a verbal canvas of 'dulled to mud once hazel-green eyes, titian curls, rosy cheeks, big pink nipples, reddish bush'. Leila's claim that she knows her face as her palette may probably suggest that her personal and professional selves are of such equal value to her, that she is likely to identify her innermost self with her exterior 'I' as an artist. For a complete artist titian curls

seem to be just the proper ones but hardly enough of an individual mark. Leila cuts her hair 'that was Pre-Raphaelite red in a shiny helmet a la Louise Brooks'. Another one of her early 'idols' is Louise Brooks who is regarded as a powerful role model alongside George Sand, while the reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is focused solely on the luminous colour scale which predominates in Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings. Yet this brief remark brings in an air of the strong and influential group's impact on both their contemporaries and subsequent generations. Leila is to grow cogent and resourceful, looking always for the 'truth in nature' as the young male artists from the Pre-Raphaelites did. [Atkins 1993]

Surprisingly or not, there are no more self-portraits depicted in the book despite the fact that *Any Woman's Blues* is a book that deals with the self-portrayal of Leila Sand. There is a single reference to the 'usual' self-portraits that Leila begins 'when no other model comes to hand'. The unfinished portrait could be found amongst the chaos in her studio which mirrors the chaos in her mind - 'a million things begun and nothing finished - a wild casting about to find inspiration in the past, in my children, in myself' [p.73/IV]. This portrait however turns out to be very enticing for a love-scene. Leila is making love with Dart on her own easel, taking 'special pleasure' from the fact that she is leaning over her own easel, on which is 'perched' an unfinished portrait of hers. The special feelings this seems to be a prompting are important in building the self-love that Leila needs so much, and which she is destined to discover later in her life. However at this point Isadora enters and argues that this scene is a case of abuse. Perhaps the answer is to be found in Leila's arguments that this is also a story about the 'fine line between love and self-annihilation'. This is also the fine line between the fierce feminism, represented by Isadora and Erica Jong's own understanding of a woman artist. Where Isadora and Leila clash is on the fine grounds of feminism claiming that such a scene is graceless and spoiling to the image of the proper feminist; i.e. that a woman who acknowledges her true sexual identity, allowing for a self-defeat and love at the same time is not suited for the realm of feminism. No wonder that the few occasional positive remarks to *The Story of O*[...] are potentially dangerous for the build-up of Leila Sand as an appropriate member of the feminist sisterhood. Obviously Erica Jong's own approach is different from the popular Feminism of the 1970-80s. Thus her heroine - Leila Sand is happy to differentiate herself from conventional popular feminist claims and to search for her own place in our contemporary culture. [Jong 1994/a]

The controversial issue of women artists' age

A polite prejudice within our culture is that a woman is never asked about her age. This kind of myth is not valid for Erica Jong though. She is devoted to fight this belief not only in her book *Any Woman's Blues* [Jong 1991] but she carries it on still further in her midlife memoir *Fear of Fifty* [Jong 1994/a]. Even the most recurrent metaphor of Jong's epitomised by the female fear of flying evidently stands not only

for the fear of creativity and the fear of success, but for the fear of aging. Erica Jong strongly believes that person can get rid of his/her fears only through facing them and taking the risk of doing so. Let us find out how Leila Sand will handle her own fear: the fear of aging.

Within the narrative Leila is identified with a woman artist in her prime. We should note that within the book there is a shift in this concept, as well. A woman in her prime is no longer a woman in her thirties but rather in her forties and fifties. The story of Leila Sand revolves around the *right* and 'wrong' side of her forties. It opens with her at 39 and closes down with her turning 45. Yet Leila is always furious at the social conventions that condemn to old women the right to grow old gracefully by comparison to men who it seems can enjoy growing old. Such a distinction returns us to the mythologized distinction of inferior/superior beings: 'It is hard enough to be a good girl and a pretty young woman - but if you try being old and female in a culture that hates the latter even more than the former.' [236/XIV].

The question of age is really a problem which persists in our new age, a problem which Erica Jong puts at the forefront through the relationship between Leila and Emily. Emily, Leila's contemporary, is seen as the 'working woman of the fin de siecle' and for her the essential issue of aging seems to be dealt most efficiently. Emmie looks the way everyone should look at fifty - serene, wise, willowy, clear-eyed, 'just crinkly enough to be womanly - and infinitely kind'. Emmie has a will of iron. She is also funny. What is often said is characteristic for the jolly way the two creative women look at this pressing issue - 'We are laughing our way towards the apocalypse. At seventy, we both expect to be working, giggling, and getting laid' [p.78/IV]. This is the philosophy of a wise age in which women cannot afford to grow sulky and get lost because of the ruling social norms.

With wisdom comes the re-assessment of the male/female bonds. It is conveyed in a manner which is typical for Jong, in that it is an outrageously ironic mode of expression. It is 'cosmically sad' because all their lives, women are taught to look to men for guidance and support. And then when women reach middle age they realize how *terribly frail* men are. Leila is caught in the game of it, and it makes her weep. She wants a partner, and all she finds are the 'gigolos or terrified middle-aged babies'. At some point even Wayne Rebound, Leila's colleague, is a perfect example of a terrified baby of 50-ish. He is easily seduced by a 22-year-old girl in a bar where he has taken Leila out for a drink. It becomes evident through that tiny episode that the difference between 44 and 22 in a woman's life is not just a question of looks. Leila is sure she doesn't look worse than a 22-year-old. To some men she looks better - but she knows too much. That is the evil tree of knowledge whose sour fruits creative women are supposed to pick up: 'I am less easily conned. I don't beam at them with those eager eyes. I don't smell the bullshit and call it roses.' [185/XI]

Right from the sarcastic imagery Erica Jong jumps into the philosophical discourse pondering on a biological determinism, on the question of whether it is all

is a matter of hormones. A striking question follows: 'Is it Estrogen uber alles?', where *Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles!* is suddenly and threatening misplaced by Estrogen. It seems that the Estrogen theory could prove as seriously incriminating as was the idea of a Nazi homeland. Yet Jong fights further this fear and speculates on the possible reasons for the issue of aging when coupled with knowing. The sharp contrast of bullshit/roses is still tenacious yet further developed in the blindness/power one:

Nature gives us thirty years of blindness to male bullshit so we can make the maximum number of babies. And then the estrogen begins to wane, and we come back to ourselves again. We return to the bliss we know as 9-year-olds, coloring in our coloring books. We get our lives back, our autonomy back, our power back. [185/XI]

And is that the moment of bliss when women become witches to be stoned at the marketplace? Not because they are ugly but because they know too much, because they are onto men's games, and men certainly don't like it.

Women artists as drink and drug addicts

In this novel, one of Leila's biggest fights is with her own self rather than with men or society. The novel opens in the studio-silo where we are introduced to a drinking woman rather than to a working artist. This drinking woman artist is in a tangle of female fears: afraid to move, to paint and pick up the phone and call for help. Moreover right from outset of the novel we are to realize that Leila began working drunk. This is the very alarming state of Leila's mind. One can get a clear sense of how intolerable it gets for Leila by the implicit opposition of work/drink: 'For all my indulgence in drugs I have never mixed it with my work. My work was sacred.'

For Leila her artists' world of painting is certainly a sacred domain while her drug/drink addictions are discerned as profane and ridiculous. No wonder that most of the novel's brief reviewers are ill at ease with this topic of Erica Jong's. Some of them go as far in their dislikes as to claim that Jong is manipulating her readership with the much-talked-about topic of battling alcoholism [Lodge 1989, Steinberg 1989, Pritchard 1990, Stanley 1990]. What remains obscure to the critics is the fact that Jong's interpretation of the hot topic for contemporary American society is much more profound. There is virtually no place where Jong is interested merely by the sensational side of it. She is rather concerned with the inevitability of all the ruinous addictions - drinks, drugs and wrong men - and the liability of the artist, women artists in particular, to those modern diseases. Even the entry in Leila's marbled notebook speaks of Jong's singular perspective at a time when everybody writes about alcoholism and cocaine addiction but no one tells the truth about it. Leila is given the rare chance to beat away this myth, stirred up by the media. The very metaphoric use of a convert proves that any addiction borders with strong, religious-like devotion and thus is easily to be believed in as a myth.

It is fashionable to convert on the cover of People Magazine and make a sober comeback. Getting sober is far more complex; it is really about getting free. [282/ XVIII]

This is what Leila Sand is after - getting back her freedom. Therefore she is made to go through a painful period of self-reflections about her own commitment to drinks, drugs and men. It is certainly a long and difficult period which eventually takes a book of 20 chapters to be told. In a way this could be considered as the paramount issue for our culture that it is obsessed with obsessions. E. Jong typically doesn't miss an opportunity to treat this issue through her usual humorous point of view. Here is Leila who keeps a lovely memory of a party. She remembers 'a blur of' other artists, art dealers, collectors, critics, 'like ghosts in a Shakespearean tragedy'. The ingenious simile rouses some mixed feelings of jolly good fun and a danger that lingers in air. The simile is a bit further elaborated in an 'as...as' clause which uncovers the ghost-story. It seems that it is either because they were 'as drunk and stoned as we (Leila and Dart) were or we were drunk and stoned enough for both'. Leila is convinced that 'all the artists drank and used that way'. But immediately there comes the recurrent ironic understatement 'Or so I thought' which spoils her convenient belief.

Even the summoning of the Penelope myth doesn't sound like the sole consolation for Leila. Penelope or Leila, Ulysses or Dart - after all it is the same old story of Penelope who knew this, loving Ulysses: years of waiting for a man to come home makes a woman mad. Suddenly Penelope who is the paragon of all the domestic virtues in the Homeric legend is converted by E. Jong to a mad woman, who instead of knitting her never-ending web, or painting her works, keeps waiting...

I wait. I wait. And as I wait, I try to paint. Unable to paint, I drink. And having drunk, I plunge into despair. [p.71/III]

The syncopated repetitive nature of the paragraph echoes the gloom and misery in Leila's mind and heart. Leila is so desperate that she tries every drug - until she could feel nothing... nothing but the love 'leaching through her fingertips onto the canvas'. Even through the metaphoric use of leach we could realize how strong the drink effect is - even Leila's love for painting behaves like a drunk, leaching like a liquid does, perhaps like a booze. It seems that the strong alcoholic background of Leila is not to be blamed. There is only a single reference to the fact that she was born to an alcoholic mother and alcoholic father. But what is important for her is that she was born to a life of 'living by her wits', that she inherited her parents' weird outlook and just happened to be an alcoholic for a while.

We could assume that Erica Jong picks up this transitional period in Leila's life when she is struggling to rationalize and give up her addictions for at least two reasons. On the one hand Leila's clinging to her addictions is a commonplace practice nowadays. Hence it is a nice firm setting for illuminating the contemporary myth of women artists. On the other hand we could possibly recognize how the new Leila, free of her addictions, appropriates the myth and re-claims new features for women artists.

There is hardly a point in time when Leila doubts her identity as an artist. What she doubts though is her being an alcoholic. Neither asking Emmie, nor herself could give her an answer. Leila's alcoholism is a real conundrum to her. This unsolved mystery is perfectly caught by Erica Jong in the story by an incident at the wine cellar of Danny Doland from Dallas. It is qualified by Leila's transitional mind as a wonder into which she wanders in like 'Theseus in the labyrinth'. The consistent stress on the labyrinth-like puzzle that starts earlier with the conundrum simile is able to convince the reader how enigmatic yet alluring Leila grows once she gets under the influence. There is an outburst of ironic poeticisms when Leila is in the realm of the wine cellar. Photographed by *Architectural Digest*, as if further mythologized by the press-media, this cellar of a wonder 'sits as the diamond as big as the Ritz sat beneath Scott Fitzgerald's mythical mountain mansion.' The cross-reference to the Scott Fitzgerald as a myth-maker is coupled with the implications of Leila as a Theseus.

I wander in, examine several bottles of rare Bordeaux and choose a Mouton⁴⁵ to get drunk on. Oh, I am not getting drunk on wine so much as on these lovely French names that roll off my tongue even more trippingly than the wine...

One could even suspect that there is something positive indeed in the drinking experience of Leila - it just emanates from the image of the wild, passionate and poetic woman artist in her. Yet ironically enough this is where Leila's hegira (flight/ departure) has taken her - to a wine cellar buried in a basement in the Berkshires, 'drinking claret and getting murky'? Leila's flight from her drinking self brings her to the congenial dark cellar. Even in the visual contrast of claret/murky we can detect some of the inner conflict of Leila's transition - from the intensively gloomy state after something as bright and clear as claret she goes to her maenads and crystals, to her new series of paintings. Isn't it quite expressive that when Leila first stopped drinking she was 'given a great, great gift' - a new series of paintings [230,1/XIV]. Yet this is the time for her to realize that she still needs her intoxication - either a claret or a man. Danny Doland from Dallas fails to be the latter for Leila but his beautiful cellar seems to compensate. Drawing without Intoxication - that was the risk Leila ran marrying Danny. Unsurprisingly this marriage is literally and spiritually felt like 'another sort of jail' to her.

Alcoholism doesn't stir only sweet-minded poeticisms but pictures of battered women from the newspapers with which Leila is likely to identify. Despite her awareness of being a 'high-bottom' drunk who never lost everything, but did allow herself to be beaten, to be raped financially, Leila couldn't help but doing almost anything for love. It is done for love which in Leila's terms means skinlessness and ecstasy, even if it bordered with self-annihilation - and sometimes it did. 'I know that I spend money like a drunk, fuck like a drunk, seek abuse like a drunk.'

In her clearest moments, Leila would get on her knees before the easel, open her palms, and invoke God, Goddess, her muse. But always there are days when she could

not ...paint; and then she would try to 'stroke the fires' with pot, wine, coke - or with her real drug, her main drug: men. Once again E. Jong's narrative claims that drug-abuse means much more - self-abuse. With her favourite 'Or so I thought' mode of ironic expression Jong debases the fact that Leila needed a man to power her art, to approve it, to give her permission, as if she needed that 'flesh connection in order to blossom'. And so we can hear the voice of the self-sabotaging woman artist who felt she was daring the Gods by being so bold; who would rather go back to the safe old myth of the good girl. This is the eternal contradiction Leila is trying to live with thus going to the bottom of the well of her self-annihilation. Even the endlessly repetitive nature of the verbal pattern 'So I would do' is reminding us of the powerful mythical convention of the traditional creative woman. This is the woman artist who 'would cling' to a lover as if the force came through him, and then she 'would come to believe' that it was he, not she, who made the work come true. Then, inevitably, he 'would start' to abuse her. Or perhaps the woman-artist 'would start' to abuse herself. Leila 'would give' herself over to him and 'would believe' that he made the work possible... and finally, having given the work away, she 'would not be able' to do it unless he was there.

The rite of passage for Leila Sand - the AA Meetings

In the initiation of the new myth for the creative woman, as with all myths, our heroine needs to pass through a rite of passage. The rite of passage for Leila is the AA, Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings. They are held at various church basements and it is here Emmie introduces her. Leila is initiated into this new world half-way through the book which is also very telling about the central place of this experience for Leila. Further on the AA is viewed most appropriately as 'only one of many roads to self-knowledge' rather than a sensational up-to-date activity. The AA follows suit when Leila learns that the answer to her problems lies within her and she stops blaming other people. For the woman artist however the Twelve Steps of the AA meetings inevitably resemble the Rules of Love - a codification of the Provencal poets of love, written centuries ago. They are both treated like parallel universes, like 'floating spars to a drowning person' [p.127/VII]. It seems comforting for a person who hit the bottom to know that others have passed that way before. Yet the drive towards the bottom invokes the image of the drowning person which make the reader appreciate the huge upheaval involved.

Qualifying at an AA meeting: without your knowing what transpired, your whole life is altered - it is like childbirth, like falling in love, like the Land of Fuck. It is hard to remember what you did there, said there, cried there... [p.101,8,2/VI]

The AA period is worthy enough as an initiation which Leila needs badly as a means to rationalize her search for her innermost identity. She needs sobriety to set herself free of her addictions although she feels the sobriety, which AA brings to her, has taken everything from her that she cares about - sex, her work, Dart. Yet

'feelings are not facts' and this is just another self-revelation pushed up by Emmie, who has been through AA herself, and who knows that 'It will be maenads and crystal from now on' [p.131/VIII].

Evidently the AA is attributed as the important watershed for Leila and for her new identity. Unsurprisingly the group love therapy of the AA is perceived by Erica Jong as a search of people for a new way to be 'communal animals'. Leila, though an avid individualist, mingles with those people. She becomes just one of them. They all needed new tribal identities, because the old ones do not hold for them. For Leila, the old myth of the artist is not enough and she too is trying 'to reinvent the human species' in church basements like the rest. This reinvention marks a new stage in Leila's life, as well as a new profile for an emerging myth of the artist. Far from being sympathetic, Jong makes fun of the contemporary ritual of getting sober. This is a ritual with coffee instead of sacramental wine, with Oreos instead of holy wafers. 'The blood and the body: instant coffee and chocolate cream cookies. A caffeine-and-sugar rush to lift us toward God.'

As if always looking at the bright side of life in her rush to her own self Leila is aware that there is a border to be crossed in which fate and the gods are involved. That she didn't get killed is a tribute not to prudence but to providence or sheer dumb luck that she mysteriously preserved her during her drinking, drugging and driving days. She is pretty convinced that the gods must have spared her for some 'awesome task' and whatever it is, she 'would fashion it with her own two capable hands' [p. 53/III]. The woman artist then goes to Yale School of Arts and there is certainly a play with the Romantic notion of Artist as Demiurg, destined to create with her hands.

Women artists' inner self and Leila's sane mind

If we assume that the search for woman artist's inner self and happiness constitutes the fable of *Any Woman's Blues* we can once again realize why the re-creation of women artists myth is so significant for E. Jong's narrative. Leila's sane mind is given a priority within the text as the ultimate truth-seeker. It is neither Emmie, nor Dart who can advise Leila but the voice within herself. This is the voice that Sybille, Leila's shrink, calls the voice of her sane mind.

She [Sybille] means the voice of that fierce advocate within myself, the sane centered part of me that is on my own side, that shining nugget of self-love surrounded by fathomless darkness. But I can hear it only intermittently, through the static of obsession. [p.80/IV]

There is hardly any other attribute of Leila's inner self that can most fittingly match her but fierceness. It seems that this fierce advocate within herself can guarantee that the tiny portion of self-love will survive. Apparently Leila's self-love is a brand-new all-round sensation that is very empowering- it can be heard, viewed, felt. It seems to be all around her although the witty contrast of light and tiny /dark

and huge in the shining nugget and fathomless darkness is to alarm us how dangerous and haunting an obsession is. Leila knows that in his own way Dart loves her but that isn't any longer enough for her. She has to love herself.

The witty contrast above is further elaborated on with the metaphor of the good ship Leila who must sail on despite this pirate Dart down in the hold who is 'punching a hole in the hull'. It is worth noting that E. Jong is extremely fond of water and air imagery. All throughout *Any Woman's Blues* we will continue finding various flying and diving metaphors that are strongly associated with women artists' creativity. E. Jong's particular emphasis now is on the opposition of good and bad. Yet it is somewhat reversed - the ever bad girl Leila is no longer approving of the pirate treatment of the nice guy. The irony of this reversal of roles is that Leila starts behaving like a good girl. Yet this is not the notion of the traditional good girl. This is something beyond the good girlism myth, something that will eventually prove good and efficient for Leila and misery for Dart. Always before while trying to think of her supreme wish Leila knew that wish has been to keep Dart. Now it is for her. Now instead of worrying about Dart, she could be doing what's best for Leila. Although Emmie's advice may be pushing Leila to the extreme, trying to cross over Dart, it is in tune with Leila's sane mind. Her sanity wishes for the power to keep the clarity brought by the hardworking days of the maenads and crystals [p.112/VI].

Make yourself your first priority - you don't have to be at the affect of someone else. Seize your life. Dart's incidental - and boring. [p.138/VII]

Apparently this is the clarity of her crystal clear still-lives, the clarity of knowing where exactly one draws the line between forgiveness and self-protection. And Leila's sane mind is power-generating. Although being far off and barely audible, one can hear it whispering: 'Leila, you are lovable, you really are. You don't have to put up with this shit' [p.127,5/VII]. It is not only Leila's sane mind that stirs up this positive pressure and need for self-love but Emmie, too. Leila is strung by the question Emmie raises: 'Leila, but how much do you love Leila?' The strong disturbing impact of strung is coupled with the short answer 'Not much', which Leila is able to produce; as well as with the anxiety that springs from the view of Emmie that there is something 'drastically wrong', because 'Leila is lovable' [p.103/VI]. Over and over again the lovely 'l'-alliteration in lovable Leila will be put to test because Leila is scarcely able to believe she is that lovable. Once again we will deal with watery images instead of flying metaphors. Doubting Leila feels like an octopus cut into bits and tossed into - the lagoon to grow again. This is the terrifying life she/E. Jong has chosen for herself - or the muse has chosen for her - to dive to the bottom of the lagoon again and again, seeking skinlessness, seeking self-annihilation [p.310/XIX]. The pirate no longer is Dart but Renzo and the Venice lagoon is interiorized by the sane mind of Leila as the image of nonattachment. This is Leila's ideal alternative to her life of obsessions - nonattachment, as the key to everything in life. Because she wants to feel everything, to get lost in sensation, and yet also wants to be able to give away all of herself and still have some piece of herself to regenerate from - like an octopus.

We can probably review Leila's engagement to herself not so much as a bizarre whim of a woman artist but as the ultimate expression of Leila's drive towards nonattachment. We are to witness a weird wedding when Leila Sand is engaged to marry Louise Zandberg. And we are to celebrate not only the comeback of Leila's true identity (by the respect paid to her real name) but the comeback home of her sane mind.

I belong somewhere other than the floor of my foyer, weeping. My sane mind is back, and welcome to it! [p.145/VII]

Who is Leila/Louise/Luisa really? Erica Jong is trying to identify Leila with the 'youness' of the reader or the hand that grasps the pencil, i.e. with the creativity of the talented people. Jong's urge to re-claim that these are any woman's blues, that Leila's hair, her eyes, her profession, her men, may change for they are all flesh, can only help us build up the high profile of a mythologized heroine [280/XVIII]. At the same time Leila is still obsessed with the 'towering figure of I'. This is the 'I' without which she can hardly be. All throughout the text Leila is trying to 'abolish the first person', to get free of the 'towering shadow of the ninth letter of the alphabet'. But she is destined to search for it and to start loving it.

And what is 'life' anyway? Leila Sand's and any woman artist's life at its truest and purest, seems to consist of standing before an easel, smelling the turpentine smell and 'arranging the hues of white on a white canvas before green hills'. This is where Leila could stand for all eternity.

I seem in fact to have been standing here for all eternity. This is your life, Leila Sand, the youness of you. How lucky to have found it, or to have come back to it before it was too late. [184/XI]

All in all it seems that art reshapes life even more than life shapes art, that Leila's personal identity is of a self-empowering woman artist who is a devotee to life's abundance. Leila's sexual escapades will shortly prove that to flourish art needs life and love as much as life needs art.

Women Artists' Sexual Identity

Both Leila Sand's sexual and professional life are essentially scored by the men she falls in love with. She is definitely aware that this lifestyle is an 'odd' break through the conventions of many years on end. The way women measure their lives nowadays in love affairs, as women of another time used to measure theirs in children, is really odd from the perspective of the popular myth. Leila's lifestyle is presented by Jong as typical to the women of her time and can be grasped as an initiation of another aspect of the contemporary women artist's myth: the unique blend of art and love, of art and sex. In order to explore this aspect thoroughly we need to gain a close insight of Leila's five love affairs, as well as of her experience of motherhood. Perhaps only then we will realize how vital and important all of them: Thom, Elmore, Dart, Danny and Renzo, as well as the twins, are for the fulfillment of Leila's emotional identity.

Seducing the muse

Throughout the novel, Leila is presented as a woman artist who is not afraid to speak her mind and as a woman who cannot do without love making in her art making. This is delivered consistently through the prism of 'always'. Leila was 'always transfixed' by sex because she 'always' knew it was the primary way to seduce the muse. We could possibly argue that in the meaning of the verb transfix there is a room for a Cupid imagery. It is Cupid's job to pierce through the heart of a woman artist and thus to propel her art. 'I've never lived without a man. I need sex to power my creativity. I need skinlessness to get in touch with the muse.'

The metaphoric use of power suggests that the strength, skills and the authority of Leila's work are largely due to her devotion to love and sex. However Leila's need for sex is very intricately constructed. It is part of her need to be loved and to be loving that aspires to something beyond sex, to 'skinlessness'. This neologism, used recurrently in the narrative, is coined by Erica Jong and it seems to drive her heroine beyond the realm of the visible and the touchable. Actually whenever Jong refers to sex and love she means the realm of myth, fairy-tale, mystery and dream. Unsurprisingly her need to set this realm apart from reality very often invokes in her oeuvre the topos of H. Miller - 'The Land of Fuck' [Miller 1992]. This paradoxical rendering of Leila's aspirations, i.e. as something out of reach and out of touch as skinlessness that is able to put her in touch with the muse, could be conceived as a hint of self-irony, anticipating the period when sex and creativity are no longer one:

I went back to meetings, my work, my twins. No more dating. No more searching for the holy grail of cock. Enough already. Nevermind that for years I had thought it the life force. Nevermind that I thought sex and creativity were one. 220/XIII

It takes a lot of time and efforts in search of selfhood for Leila to realize that both her best friend, Emily Quinn and her sane mind prove right. A woman artist needs herself to power her creativity. Dart takes Leila away from herself, from the twins, from her work. (p.104,5/VI)

Despite this revelations Leila insists that her creative self desperately needs love and affection. Only a powerful and self-confident 'knight' as she is, could eventually give up her quest for the holy grail...of cock. The hilarious zeugmatic image acquires a demythologizing effect on our well-established concepts of pre-/Christian times. The holy grail or the chalice, traditionally used by Christ at the Last Supper is also a subject of a great amount of mediaeval legend, romance and allegory. It apparently used to be the test for perfect purity of any adventurous and daring person. It also fires the ambition of any traveller set on a quest to the reality of the unseen (Tennyson's Holy Grail/ Idylls of the King).

Although Leila Sand fails at some point in her search to keep her notion of the life force of cock as sacred as the holy grail, she pertains to her ardent self-mythologized belief in art and love: 'And if artists love so often and so hard, it is because they have a rage to live' [p. 82/IV]

And so often and so hard Leila loves. Out of her rage to live we come to another point in the contemporary myth quite crucial for the sexual/emotional identity of women artists.

The myth of the perfect man

We could closely follow Leila's search of the ideal man step by step, man by man, just to realize probably that none of them holds the holy grail of creativity. All the five of them - Thom, Elmore, Dart, Danny and Renzo - bring to the fore a highly suggestive number of de/mythologemas and thus contribute to Leila's artistic personality. The readers of Leila's love stories will enter a world of ex-lovers and ex-husbands such as Thom and Elmore; would-be ones such as Danny and Renzo, and the omnipresent, most-talked-about lover - Dart. Within the love/art narrative of Erica Jong they are not equals. Thom and Elmore share the novelistic space of the III Chapter only; Danny and Renzo are also limited to a single chapter each, while Dart is darting everywhere within the book. Not surprisingly all of them will be 'invading' Leila's professional world, cutting it into art periods.

Thom & Leila

Thom is Leila's first husband who is an English Lit. graduate and a WASP. Although Thom 'aided and abetted her in all these ventures: buying the art, financing all her brash, hare-brained schemes', he proved too weak for her strong, craving for recognition and her artistic ego. Despite all his encouraging efforts he appears inevitably attached to his swollen WASPdom, being too much in love with himself. We will later resort to the social aspects of the myth of WASPdom versus Jewishness when approaching the relationship Dart/Leila.

Even at this early point of Leila's career she is characterized with everything that evokes strength: her brash, i.e. bold and impudent projects; her ventures, rather than simply art activities. No wonder that Thom treats her as 'the great achievement of his life at that point', taking a considerable pride in marrying her (p.56/II). Isn't this attitude of Thom enough to boost Leila Sand as a myth herself? Read on to find out what happens a bit later with this myth-making process:

Enter Elmore Dworkin

Elmore is Leila's second husband and the father of the girl-twins Mike and Ed. But besides that, he is an artist proper. The CV of Elmore Dworkin reads that he is 'an abstract expressionist' far more established and older' than Leila (p.56,7,8/II). His looks also fit the strong romantic myth of the hirsute artist: hairy and rough. Elmore seems to be the perfect match for Leila, the woman artist who is soon to be mythologized by the public as a celebrity.

I fell in love with his paintings and his tongue; I equally admired his cock and his paintings; In one evening I was introduced to the New York School's most

promising younger artist, multiple orgasms, and Humboldt County sinsemilla. p.57/III

The sudden shift from the realm of the high art to the low body pleasures could be reminiscent of Henry Miller's stylistic approach in *The Tropic of Cancer* [Miller 1992] and even to be seen as a celebration of the artist's rage to live and work, of the inseparability of art and love. It is so appealing that it easily recurs whenever love strikes a chord with art. In this same vein, we will be given the essence of Leila/Thom relationship in a nutshell. The year they spent in Italy is made distinct through another zeugma device. They lived that year 'in a tangle of thighs, art history and extra-virgin olive oil'. We are not far from assuming this was the happiest time for them both, when their work prospered, their babies grew, their love grew because they 'lived for love, for art, for bed, for babies'. p.59/III

One could easily guess that this idyll, this 'blessed, blissed' life is unlikely to happen in one's homeland. It too much resembles a paradise and by definition paradise is not here. It is always there. Indeed it proves that the happy couple has moved to the mythical land of art. One is tempted to say Paris. However, in Erica Jong's reading of the myth, Paris is in Italy. We will discover what are the reasons for such a peculiar shift of places soon in the last chapter that covers women artists' professional ID. By now it seems sufficient to note that Jong tends to refer to this period in positive, yet exaggerated terms. Leila is more than happily married to another artist and this is considered as 'the greatest ecstasy of all'. What could be 'more joyful' than two artists living together, doing their work, nurturing their babies, cooking, loving, walking through the churches and art galleries of Italy. (p.59, 60,5/III)

The New Myth of Pregnancy and Motherhood

Immediately after the out-pouring of exclamations about bliss, we are shown how this paradise could be as easily lost as gained. This new period is initiated by a new myth of pregnancy and motherhood. It is extremely vital for Erica Jong's woman artist to communicate and rationalize how her motherhood affects her works.

This begins with 'the challenge of raising twins, managing twin careers, and battling the New York art world' (p.62) but what is preceding is the hyper-period of pregnancy. Once pregnant, Leila becomes 'hyperJewish, hyperartistic, hypersensitive'. (p.60/III) The hyper-ness of Leila is thus juxtapositioned against her 'true nature'. As a mother-to-be this could be related both to her self-sustained identity of a powerful woman and a capable artist that is made explicit in this clear-cut statement of hers:

I could no more have brought WASP babies [Thom's] into the world than I could have stopped drawing and painting p.59; I might live and paint in Italy but I would, like Sophia Loren, have my babies born in Switzerland [p.61/III]

The tinge of social irony here brims with another artistic life turned into a mythological role model for Leila. What is more, pregnancy is considered by Jong as the 'most glorious time' in Leila's life. She 'lay in bed like a queen', waiting to bear

her 'princesses'. What is quite sparkling is that both Elmore and Leila kept pregnancy notebooks with sketches of each other. Both queen and sketches will further be 'embraced' as key words for Leila's professional and social identity. What is worth noting here is that those sketchbooks are immediately viewed, although in brackets, in the manner of Dart period anticipated. Both of the notebooks are kept 'back to back - or belly to belly' on a shelf in Leila's studio in Connecticut and even through her commitment to Dart at this point in the novel, Leila is still infatuated with their precious symbolism. Hence she still cannot look at them 'without a twinge'.

How could such bliss have ended? How, indeed? In Leila's mind as an artist it happens gradually. The hyperglorious time comes abruptly to a close firstly when she goes into the Operating Room as an artist and a lover and goes out an artist and a mother and secondly when Elmore's age, cock and career begin to fail him, while Leila's twin career of a mother of twins and a painter seems ever more rising and ascending. Then 'the universe of love began to shift - irrevocably' and the loving and caring husband turns into a 'wimp and dominator.' Leila is also struggling with her new identity of a mother: Motherhood seems to have 'radicalized' Leila in a strange way. All her life she had despised women who whined, 'women who cursed woman's lot, women who claimed to be through with love' but once a mother she is ready to convert to Feminism. Jong is eager to convince the reader that Leila's motherhood brings her a brand-new frame of mind for women artists. We face a woman, a mother that had 'never' called herself a feminist before, who had 'abhorred' that label, who had to cope with her life without a man. (p.64/III)

However Leila keeps her hyperartisticity even through her life of a single mother. It even calls forth the Greek triple goddess of the lower world Demeter/Persephone/Hecate as the embodiment of her fate to have her daughter split between her and Elmore, between her and the black, unknown, infernal lower world of Elmore.

I seem always to have been obsessed with the myth of Persephone, as if somehow I knew that I would live a life in which I needed her wisdom to cope with the chthonic departures of my daughters. They come and go - to Hades and back again - and when they return, it is always spring.

But the subconscious identification of Leila with the three deities, who were invoked to maintain life and assure fertility is not incidental. Their function is quintessentially creative. These were gods of prosperity and plenty. Creation could not be possible if fertility was not ensured. In the human world it is the fertility of women that is the basis of reproduction; in the realm of the vegetable life it is the fertility of the soil that ensures growth. Woman was likened to the earth and the birth of man was thus assimilated to the birth of the plant life.

Thus motherhood could be also be interpreted as 'the most acceptable form of female creativity; as women have done throughout the ages and filled her daughters with feminist rage'[Jong 1994/a, p.50]. Our search for the myth of women artists and mothers have drawn us aside from the story of Leila and made us confront with the

myths of the previous generation. This is how we meet Erica Jong's mother, an artist herself, caught in a range of lifelong rage, frustration and self-resentment while facing the unfairness of the world and having being forced by it to stop painting. Erica Jong argues in depth about the social/political issues that make this world so difficult for women, and conspire against having both motherhood and the life of the mind. The daughter, Leila Sand, makes a clear statement that hers is the first generation in which being a writer and a mother is not utterly impossible though it is still hard. Jong further underlines this by a survey of the brief biographies of famous women in which she discovers that they had no children or only one. Thus Jong concentrates on this recent transitional time when the status-quo is beginning to change slowly and thus sets the historical time limits of the women artists myth.

Whether it is a writer or an artist who seeks the luxurious life of the mind, it is now that the blend of art and motherhood needs to be embodied in the new extraordinary character of women artists who could be called Ms Have-it-all:

We wanted to have it all - work and love, paintings and babies - and we have had it, but we have paid a price: the price of loneliness and isolation. Nobody prepared us for all this, because nobody knew how to prepare us. We were caught in a strange historical moment.

However, with Thom and Elmore gone we can now approach Leila's relationship with her greatest love, Dart.

Dart

Dart is the foremost of Leila's lovers. He ranks first in her love pantheon. On the one hand Dart is the perfect unhavable God-like and Don Juan figure to whom Leila aspires ; and on the other his importance is much too much her own creation, her own self. It is in this love affair that Leila's myth of 'skinlessness' closes. Probably one of the reasons for his power over her is that Dart stands for life and to Leila's mind life and art are irresistible. Leila and Dart's relationship is perceived as an even exchange - Leila gave him the gifts, made him a star, but he also gave her gifts - chief among them bringing her back from the dead. This is how life and love are closely intertwined as love and art in Jong's narrative as these lovers give each other life. That is what makes love so irresistible - no matter what killjoys say. Who can resist the one who makes you feel alive? Who can resist salt and sperm and sea and shakti? For love is nothing less than the gift of life. (Though sometimes you have to pay for it with your own death). [p.82/IV]

Leila who, even in her marriages always maintained her obsessive separateness - now feels 'relaxed' into the sweetness of coupling, the sweetness of partnership, the two who are united against a world of hostile strangers.(p.31/I) It seems that Leila's sexual identity is very keen on handling ancient mythological images and couples. Here is an example of the mythological reunion of male and female. Erica Jong's style conjures up various arche-symbols and patterns and makes this love

scene sound both real and unreal. The setting moon and the rising sun can provide the classic ambiance for a love scene, but it is scarcely enough. We can feel the touch of the devil who aids the two sorcerers, who are practicing the magic art of love. The witch and warlock match each other even in the way they sound alike - the bad girl needs the bad boy. Further more the Greek and Egyptian superior mother-goddesses can evoke their supreme counterparts and sons as if to initiate the modern couple into the mythological domain of love and war. But the earth that obviously stands for Leila proves unbeatable no matter how much it hurts when Dart is gone.

Under the mocking moon we couple like witch and warlock, powered by the blue fullness of the moon. ...on one side of my bedroom the moon sets: on the other side the sun rises. I lie in the middle - Isis with Horus in her arms, Astarte with Adonis, Rhea with Zeus who is destined to dethrone her. But can we ever dethrone the earth? The earth is there whatever we do. [p.113/VI]

Dart is not exceptionally identified with Horus, Adonis and Zeus or the devil. Usually he is referred to as 'a young god, whose armpits are lined with gold (p.31) or 'lying in the sun like a young god; with the glimmering gold of his chest'. Leila is fascinated and bound to him in the archaic sense of the word - enchantment - with rapture, with magic, with 'invisible ropes of allure'. Thus Dart implies both the good and bad sides of a God/Devil stereotyped dualisms trying to achieve the balanced status between the two. Leila is really torn apart in her need to both nurture and annihilate her creativity at once. For Dart seems not just a great lay, Leila's knight on a white charger or live-in muse, i.e. everything that is positive and constructive for a woman artist. For Dart's dark side seems to be rather destructive. He is likened to a great hungry primitive god and his insatiable desires to a gluttonous primitive ritual. Dart is 'ravenous' for virgins, wreaths of flowers, plucked hearts, slaughtered oxen, chalices of blood, burnt offerings. (p.20/I).

If the notion of a sacred offering figures somewhat earnestly, there is also a fair amount of ironic humour, bordering on ridicule. The reader is perhaps able to take the joke when Dart trades his place with Pan or the warrior god. Very often Leila is nursing the delusion of having found at last her Pan, her universal deity. However her Pan is a naughty down-to-earth deity who 'does not buy one life insurance nor come home for dinner at the same time each night'. Obviously Jong is busy with reworking the Greek mythology although she prefers to keep alive Pan's goatish lustful nature and to attribute it to Dart. In Jong's reworking, Pan/Dart is no longer the symbol of fecundity himself but he can only discharge abundance and productivity in the women's art.

Dart is also the warrior god eventhough he is engaged in a rather low-profile battle while 'he is killing a copperhead by blasting its head off with a shotgun'(152/IX). Dart is able to enter the locked house of Leila without leaving a trace to take some of his things as the perfect second-story man. There are number of instances when Jong puts to doubt Dart's presence as if he never really existed, as if he was entirely made up by Leila's creative imagination. Thus Dart will often be viewed as

someone who belongs to the underground world of human sexual desires - as if he emerged from under an earth barrow like one of the little people, the green man 'the horned god of the witches and like all devils, he is our own creation' (p.190/XI).

The longer Dart is gone the more intense becomes Leila's need for God=Dart:

My God, my God. Dart, Dart, Dart. I convulse around the Michelangelo-Brancusi-Marini marble, shouting Dart's name and God's name as if they were one.

The marble that clings to the grand names of the old masters of sculpture appears to be a life-size marble cock, sent by a famous Japanese sculptor when Leila Sand's film stills of Dart opened in Tokyo. With her mind set on the immutable blend of art and sexuality Erica Jong points with a hint of humour and sadness and a reference to the great masterpieces that the marble cock is as pure as Michaelangelo's Pieta, that its cold white purity is half Brancusi bird and half Marini horse cock. Juxtaposed to this earnest praise is an ironic touch - this is the same Pieta in Vatican, which was not long ago 'defaced by some thug'(p.191/XI)

In our search for Leila's sexual identity we are coming to a point in which Dart is Leila and Leila is him. He is a part of Leila - the crazy, irresponsible part maybe, the part she couldn't freely express. Leila is eager to identify herself with the badness and boy-ness of Dart as if to prove how pressing is the need to break the conventional female stereotype. She is aspiring to the bad boy 'roaring inside' her who wants to run, to bolt, to drink, to drug, to be Donna Giovanna, Donna Quixota, 'the madcap picara with no fixed address and a million aliases'. No wonder Leila's addiction to Dart is so mighty. We can even attribute some positive sides to it because Dart seems to lead Leila to her self-love. When Dart left Leila felt 'like an orphan' (131,2/VIII) because she missed something really 'precious', she missed part of her own self.

In fact the last date of Dart and Leila is quite significant for the sexual integrity of Leila. This is a date far enough from the sacred place of Leila's studio in Litchfield County. Instead, Da Silvano Restaurant, New York is ironically notorious for the one of their last fights. Being invited out for lunch by her friend Emily in Da Silvano, just by accident Leila bumps into Dart's bimbo. By the time of their last rendezvous what was once love and joy seems to be gone and can only be recalled as a 'myth':

We make plans for our mythical trip. I know it is mythical - does he?.. We speak of everything: the fictitious trip, my fictitious fiancée, his million (as usual) projects. Why I am not more angry at him? Because I have discharged my anger in the Pandora's Box collage? ..But in my sane mind I don't trust him.

[286,7/XVIII]

Danny Doland from Dallas

Leila's invented 'fictitious fiancée' is actually nobody else but Danny Doland from Dallas.

With the single opening line of Danny's chapter we could compile his profile: Danny Doland from Dallas drove a Porsche. [p. 201/XII]. Thereafter he is always addressed most 'intimately' as Danny Doland from Dallas which stylistically

produces an overwhelmingly distressing and awkward feeling towards this man - Leila's third husband. The fact that he collected everything from Important Art (Monets, Modiglianis, Warhols, early Sands) to Rare Books to Major Antiques to Fine Wines can make us believe that he was 'willing to consider acquiring' Leila, as well. Everyone around Leila but her was approving of this new venturesome marriage, because at long last she has found a proper millionaire, befitting her station as a celebrity artist. Yet Leila failed to enjoy her socially convenient relationship although Danny Doland from Dallas loved Italy, Turner, Blake, i.e. all that Leila loved. He collected her film-stills but yet their affair was doomed to end very abruptly. Anyway who could tell Leila how to live and work. Not anyone who lacks the vigour and rage to live and love passionately but appropriately fits the profane notion of love in the 1980s instead:

After all was not love in the eighties merely a prelude to the purchase of real estate? and in the upper classes, art? [p. 212/XII]

Always standing on the fringe of the society even more in terms of her sexual identity, Leila would never put up with this zeal of consumerism. What she seeks desperately is her true self, her artist's self, her Dart-ing self. Never before was she closer to it. Her relationship to Renzo offers her another kind of relationship

Renzo's period

Right from the start of their love story we will recognize that Leila is still obsessed by Dart. The haunting parallels between the two lovers of hers follows inevitably. All we have here is the Italian counterpart of Dart - another Don Giovanni, but an authentic one: 'the Mediterranean man, who does the role right'. (p. 318/XIX) Is he a Mr. Right Man for a woman artist or has she merely fallen for Don Juan again? What will eventually prove right as the only proper place for love and art is the setting of Venice. Renzo is fittingly conceived as a Venetian gondolier. But like Dart, Renzo is just another version of the impossible lover - the taboo man, the demon lover, 'the incestuous incubus'. He is beautiful yet unhavable which also heightens the God imagery associated with him. Renzo belongs to another woman, to his German wife who is mothering him all the time.

Indeed Renzo's face is likewise Dart's God-like. His cheekbones are slanted like Pan's. When Leila is looking down at his feet, she is anticipating 'hooves' which are to match her great mythological expectations, 'or at least fins', as if to make us believe Renzo is inherently connected with the water, the lagoon, the sea, all the images that are boosting the woman-artist's creativity The very next moment however Jong is to disappoint the reader with an abrupt ironic turn: 'But all I see are cream-colored loafers and no socks'.

Actually Renzo is always approached through a simile and his own identity is thus questioned. With his 'tousled' blackish curls looks like a young Bacchus. With his 'too pointed' ears, he looks slightly like a satyr. With his ebony hair and his sea-

green eyes, he looks 'like a giavanotto painted by Bronzino'. It seems that all the attendants of Bacchus are summoned - fauns, satyrs, pans to foster the lascivious and lewdish nature of Leila's lovers. And lewdishness is an entirely positive notion in Leila's and Jong's frame of mind.(see Jong, Index Journal). No wonder that Renzo is looking 'even more a satyr in the morning light'. This is really a powerful combination of Bacchus images gathered in all in one that evokes her womanliness and all her Jewishness. And they are like Pan and Ceres, the god of the woods and the goddess of grain, who lie together 'smelling their own musk, their love odor.' (345/XX) However Renzo is more than a rough macho-man or a practiced Casanova because there is about him 'a courtliness, a gentilezza', that made Leila think of the Italian Renaissance (303,4,5,7/XVIII).

The passionate lay of Renzo and Leila evokes plenty of popular- images. This is how we once again after Dart, the Land of Fuck is revisited. The recurrent emphasis on the name of this special topos pays homage to this image devised initially by Henry Miller. Miller's rage to live and work conjures up Jong's positive notion of the animal sex, this need for mastery, possession. Without this animal entering, sex doesn't work, and only when sex works like this can you enter the Land of Fuck. This image also brings to the front plenty of water:

Renzo and I do not practice safe sex. In the Land of Fuck nothing is safe. We are lost in a watery Atlantis, in the middle of the lagoon, where we communicate with cock and cunt 308/XIX

The legendary implications of Atlantis are ones of an imaginary island that once used to be a powerful kingdom before it was overwhelmed by the sea.(see Brewers'). But now it is powered by the mighty love of Renzo and Leila. This idea of the island brought back to life from the ancient myth is intensified by the cliché of discovering America. She - as America, he as Columbus: 'He is fucking me as if he wants to enter every part of me, discovering America.' [315/XIX]

The mythological lay needs a reference to the primal couple of the Old Testament, Adam and Eve. So that Renzo and Leila are just about to board Noah's Ark and reproduce the whole human nation. But their biblical aspirations are bluffed giving way to a subtle irony that is on the verge of re-writing the fairy-tale of Cinderella: 'And then the bells ring and it is noon and we must go, we two daytime Cinderellas, turned to pumpkins by the stroke of noon'. [345/XX].

Leila's Venetian affair is remarkably rich in female images. Next to water, the moon is a traditional symbol associated with womanhood. The full moon setting is too perfect, too magical, too much a clichés, and like many clichés, it is also true. The appropriate romantic touch is delivered by a poetic metaphor: 'The lagoon is strafed with setting moon-sunlight'. Obviously in Jong's mode of thinking outside, inside, sun, moon, male, female are all united, denoting how vital it is for Leila to have them all without tearing them apart. Here is a cluster of unifying metaphors that glorifies Leila's aspirations: 'We [Leila and Renzo] are rocking in the boat of each other, in the lagoon

of dreams, at once liquid and starry, watery yet made of shimmering light.'

Leila's sexual identity is eager to feed on mythological personae. The amazons are also 'products' of the Greek mythology, meaning women-warriors, but now as Leila's contemporaries we would rather project the brawny, strong woman who craves for her centaur to carry her off.

Women Artists' Social Identity

While approaching Leila Sand's social self we will be getting further away from the popular myth of conventional women. Erica Jong's woman artist will appear to be a very extraordinary woman - strong and fierce, successful and famous, who is nearly mythologized in her lifetime for her artistic achievements. Despite her first-ratedness Jong's woman artist is not blind to the follies and obsessions of the world of moneymakers and winners. Leila Sand can hardly belong to this world that has ostracized her as a lonely outcast and a mad woman artist. However without being didactic Erica Jong's criticism is an effective skewering of contemporary art and society. Her apt and pointed humour employs various social metaphors - S & M, blackness, telephones, cars - which somehow dovetail neatly with the contemporary women artists' myth.

The high profile of a successful strong woman artist

The very first impression of Leila Sand that welcomes the reader is of a prosperous woman rather than of a woman artist. There is not a word, nor a hint on the artist in her. Her profession and vocation is given even lesser prominence through the device of the subordinate clause and still further by the brackets. The first contact is overwhelmingly suggestive of the triumphant ego of Leila:

In my waking life I am a successful woman (does it matter for the moment what I do), known as a tough deal-maker, an eagle-eyed reader of contracts, a good negotiator. [p.10/I]

But it is also suggestive of the self-addressed humour that will prevail in her approach to the reality and to her mind. The deliberate choice of epithets like tough and eagle-eyed is setting the background for a woman who values her success but yet is not taking it that seriously. The entertaining distinction waking life is a telltale of Leila's sleeping life in which she is presumably an artist. Indeed a bit later we will face Leila Sand that will keep her high profile of a fortunate woman artist. But she will sheepishly and ironically keep the brackets as well: 'I once painted a picture of lust (all right: the secret is out: you know what I do)' [p.13/I]

The conscious strong emphasis of Erica Jong on the success story of Leila could probably show us what is the alternative of the average humble and non-aspiring housewife like. Or perhaps it could claim the overcoming of the female fear of power and success. The uncovered 'secret' reveals to the reader a woman artist. The first encounter in the novel with Leila Sand as an artist is quite misleading. Through her

fully described painting 'of lust' Leila seems to acquire the reputation of a maker of erotic art in people's minds. However what is more relevant to the professional identity of Leila is that lust stands for her passion and desire both for work and life. Her lustful picture will prove a symbol of Leila's craving to fulfill both her sexuality of a woman and her excellence as an artist despite all of the social obstacles. This symbol also implies the emergence of the full female being despite the utopia of the good-girl myth of 1960-1980s Feminism.

Unsurprisingly besides lust the key word success will be occurring frequently whenever Leila's social ego is explored. There are just a few occasional remarks on the family and educational background but they are made from the perspective of the established artist: 'I wasn't always the queen of SoHo and Litchfield County.' [p.50/III]

This is how the third chapter Strong Woman's Blues opens trying to revise our readers' wrong idea of the woman artist's steady identity of always-being-a-celebrity. The connotations of power, patriarchy, luster and glory which spring from the word 'Queen' could possibly carry the reader from the outset of the book where Leila has made a tremendous success of herself. SoHo and Litchfield County will turn into the land of art for Leila as she devalues the myth of Paris which was valid for generations of artists except hers. America's obsession with celebrities, with money and name recognition is reflected in Erica Jong's focus on her Leila Sand who has attained wealth, position and honours as a woman and an artist. This is only a person that has scored a thorough success who could claim to be 'on the top of the world (or so it seemed)' [p.65/III]. We will not fail to notice that the self-assertive mode is slightly debased by the second thought left behind in brackets. This however pertains to the overall playfulness of the narrative. Perhaps we should account it on this playfulness that Leila's success is measured up in personal terms rather than in social. Her immediate reward is not the high profile of her public image but rather a ... love affair. Her success appears to be the nice excuse for Leila to fall into an addiction with a much younger man, called pertinently Dart. Dart is perceived as made by Leila throughout the book. He is more of a piece of art and her muse but unfortunately he fails as an artist and lover himself. One could have observed that Dart's life story was told as early as in the first chapters thus focusing on the woman artist's creation, i.e. on Dart as such, rather than on her woman artist's life. Being a woman in a grip of a sadomasochistic obsession with love Leila could rationalize her fortune in the following pathetic mode: 'What would my success be worth if I could not afford a man as beautiful and death-defying as Dart?' [p.20/II]

Leila Sand knows perfectly well that her howling success is due to her work, rather than to a man but in 'challenging the gods' by becoming so successful she could find reasons to somehow deserve Dart's generosity in bed. Leila needs a treat, a reward for all the 'desperate climbing', and at first Dart seemed to give it to her. When Leila met Dart, she had spent some 39 years of 'climbing the glass mountain

of woman artist's destiny'. The very use of the Sisyphus imagery implies the dark side of the brilliant success. It is really a Sisyphean toil, an endless and heart-breaking job to achieve a crumb of power for a woman. The difficult labour of Sisyphus is increased through the image of the fragile glass mountain. Until about this watershed in her life - the time Leila met Dart - she has lived her life for discipline, for art, as if mimicking a man's hardness despite her woman's heart.

I had lived my life like a man, managed my career, my investments, even my pregnancy, exactly as a man would have done, so I thought I can manage Dart as well. [p. 20/II]

Here we face a self-empowering woman who applies both female and male approach to her life. Merely because she cannot afford being only a mother. She needs rather to live up to her high profile of a mother and artist at once. I want raise at this point the issue of non-separatism - of female and male as qualities in every person rather than as qualities in two different sexes. Our contemporary culture tends to separate male and female as people to the extreme which brings us to the trouble of sexism and misunderstood feminism.

Women artists' fierceness

Thus we come eventually to the Erica Jong's own way of undoing the popular myth of the ever weak, passive woman by creating a strong, 'fierce' woman artist who could ride out the crises but who is nevertheless caught in her own trap: the artist in her is stronger than the woman. The dilemma to Leila is rather between the lover and the artist in her. What remains untouched is her fierceness. A 'fierce lover' would have kept her beautiful man under wraps but a 'fierce artist' instead made a star of him - and chaos ensued. (p.68/III)

The controversy is delineated by the debatable word 'fierce'. In its primary meaning of brutal, barbarous and stormy is encoded the complete antonymical opposition of the eternal woman, who must be affectionate, civilized, domesticated, gentle and innocent. Erica Jong's fierce woman artist proves to be a denial of the established myth, a woman in search of her identity at once battling the old myth and looking for a new one which is not available at hand.

Women artists' fame propels the mythologization of Leila Sand

The process of growing famous for Leila Sand is conceived both as a natural and supernatural one. It is quite telling and central for the reader to realize how the woman artist is gradually turned into a myth and a role-model in her lifetime. This is the natural outcome of her wunderkind gifts for sketching as well as her urge to gain control and power over her woman artist's destiny and career. As early as the early 1970s Leila has received 'enough recognition' as a painter to be earning a good living from her work, to be written in *The New Yorker* and *Vogue* (*People* and *Architectural Digest* would come later). At this early stage the narrator is proudly

aware that this substantial recognition is not the household-word sort of fame but something much more valuable:

It was classier, more discreet variety-fame in the art world before the art world became a total media circus. [p.57/III]

What is of great concern for the woman artist as a would-be-myth is the way her public image is launched in the art world. The attributes of classy and discreet develop an air of unique and distinct character for Leila Sand. There are certainly classier venues for her career to get a good start. However it seems that Leila Sand is no longer disturbed about her poor chances of growing established as a woman artist. She is now more of a person worried for her own 'proper' mythmaking. Leila proves strong and man-like enough to approve of the mechanism for supporting male careers for her own sake. Since there is no particular public treatment of contemporary women's art Leila is happy to adopt the tricks for appreciating men's art. These are the only available ways for mythmaking, valid for the artist of a genius who is not necessarily a man. Actually there are also definite advantages to being a woman artist, one of which is of course 'not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.' [see Gablik 1995] Anyway the word genius is never ever used in the book as if to verify this hilarious view of Guerrilla Girls.

Some Guerrilla Girls' concerns

Unsurprisingly the issues raised by Guerrilla Girls are highlighted at the point where the novel picks up the topic of artistic recognition. As a group of anonymous women who zap the white male establishment for their sexism and racism Guerrilla Girls consider themselves 'the conscience of the art world'. It is worth noting that Guerrilla Girls' irony is intrinsic to Erica Jong's approach in dealing with her woman artist, as well as for her self-reflections. Back in 1980s Guerrilla Girls took Feminism which at that point was becoming a dirty word and made it sexy and funny. There is something very empowering and also very positive, about targeting people with a lot of humour, and addressing issues that all women have a vested interest in - not apologizing for it, but being very overt about it. Here is Erica Jong anxious to argue that her woman artist Guerrilla Girls' awareness even precedes the actual one which is quite differentiating and positive a remark:

I was a bad girl in high school and even badder in college. At Yale, years before the advent of the Guerrilla Girls, I railed against the male-dominated art world (this was in early sixties, before feminism was chic, let alone tolerated, yet I was not at all against wooing art critics with my sex appeal if it would help my career. I felt even then that women were so discriminated against as a class that all was fair in love and war. [p.54/III]

Obviously Leila doesn't need to turn 80, her career will pick up but she certainly needs to work under the pressure of success just like a man. Yet she keeps applying her lipstick and her sex appeal to lure the (presumably) male art critics. This is what

might get her into trouble and lead to her being called and treated as a bad girl. The deliberate use of the grammatically improper neologism 'badder' could draw our attention to the claim of early Feminism that women showing off their sexuality are nothing but bad girls. Thus even through the implications of 'badder' Erica Jong keeps on arguing that creative women should not be denied their sexuality. Pursuing this view throughout her books and her characters, even the women of letters, who very often go through the bad experience of being hurt and sabotaged by Feminist women writers, Erica Jong is happy to discover that the youngest feminists of today are reclaiming the positiveness of women's sexuality. [Jong 1994/a] Perhaps that is why Leila Sand is always fascinated to be praised and appreciated by the men in her life (much too much like her creator Erica Jong in her own career. What is however sad but true should also be admitted: famous women attract con men and carpetbaggers. 'So one looks around and sees a world filled with Claus Von Bulows, Cheri, and Morris Townsends, in short a world of heiress-hunters, gigolos, and grifters.' [p.31/II])

Ironically Leila's fatal attraction and addiction is to her Mr. Wrong Boy, who is both suffocated and allured by her fame as if being under the spell of a myth. While introducing Leila to his parents Dart said her name being 'proud to be fucking a household name'. His father's first contact with Leila is also taking notice of her mythologized identity: 'Well, well, well', said the elder Darton. 'What an honour'. (p.33/II)

Dart's delight when bringing Leila home is made prominent by the mute fight over her between father and son. Dart was 'titillated' by his father's jealousy over Leila Sand as his father knew and admired her work. This fight takes some even more pathetic turns when the elder Darton goes as far as to try to seduce Leila up in the attic of their family house, making her try on his wife's wedding dress. The fact that he fails as a seducer in the same way his son eventually fails as a lover is perhaps just another way of saying that work, not love, keeps a woman artist alive.

Leila Sand and the myths of Jewishness and WASP-dom

However the competitiveness of Dart's father towards his son and vice versa as both are trapped in the fame of Leila, is further propelled by Leila herself. Through their relationship Leila becomes conscious of two other myths meeting together in their relationship - namely her Jewishness and Dart's WASPdom, the two being the respective 'aphrodisiacs' between them. Leila admits that her New York Jewish childhood had left her with a 'lifelong fascination for the old WASP ways'. It is not that striking then that the charisma of anything WASPish for Leila acquires some sexual connotations. She was not just fucking a man when she fucked Dart. She was fucking American history, the Mayflower myth, the colonial past. (p.32/II) Besides being a marker for the conservative, wealthy and privileged upper-class, that formerly dominated US society, WASPdom was a sort of code for Leila which she deciphers like that:

I was born rich, eccentric, and spoiled', it said, 'and I hope you find this charming, for it's my only gambit. I ate caviar as a baby, and I still eat caviar and am still a baby. [p.36/II]

Though Leila is rather appalled by her visit to Dart's family, she is yet seduced and enchanted in the attic in her own mind by the spellbinding WASPdom. The unattainability of anything WASPish for Leila could be ironically juxtaposed to her own unattainability for her mother. Louise's mother cannot even get her famous daughter on the phone without talking to her assistant, saying 'Leila Sand's residence'. Leila's glorious glamour and fame seem suddenly debased by her mother's down-to-earth words: 'Answer me, Louise - excuse me- Leila, Ms. Sand. You're such a big shot now. I remember when I used to wipe your ass.' [224/XIII]

Both by friends and strangers Leila is considered worthy of her fame. It is quite evident by now that the word 'famous' is really favoured throughout the book, coupling its mythmaking effect with strong epithets and phrases like 'unforgettable talent', 'such a gifted painter', 'a noted one'. The Grand Venice Ball, which closes the novel, once used to impress Leila because she grew up poor in Washington Heights, particularly at the start of her career when her 'face became a ticket to ride, her name an open sesame, her paintings the magic combination that released the lock' 329/XX. The metaphoric cluster of images is quite telling about the way a myth sheds its magic for those who experience it.

The media myth-making reviews

There is still another episode that catches on Jong's critical attitude towards the media mythmaking reviews. The power of electronic media is absolutely overwhelming. This is how through an irrelevant bar scene the TV myth of Leila could gain a strange life of its own. Leila's mass culture image of the artist who had 'that cute boyfriend and photographed him' really sticks thanks to the show about her on TV. The young girl in the bar looks at Leila 'avidly' and produces the perfectly predictable response to the assumed TV message:

Hey, I saw you on TV! Didn't you do those big pictures of your boyfriend or something? I never forget a face. Hey-that's really neat. This chick photographed this dude in costumes. Where is he? He was cute./ Gone the way of cute men/ I wish I was an artist.

Isn't it obvious how TV can create and ruin identities? How close it can draw someone to a myth and the viewers to the supporters of this myth? Although the ridiculous wish of the young lady to be an artist for no good reason but to get hold of cute lovers could be laughed at, it is nonetheless true that a TV image is a powerful generator of myths and mythological heroes today.

Contemporary women's art - moneywise

In our contemporary culture money is the ultimate expression of power. We may find it odd though that a novel so obsessed with power in all its positive and negative sides ignores the big issue of money. There are just a few instances in which the

question of moneymaking is tackled. While it is implied that Leila Sand is powerful enough to disregard this issue and to focus on herself, on her self-love, Leila's main pursuit seems to be something beyond money and growing rich. Moreover she is busy to spend rather than multiply her income on charity-like art affairs by building a gallery for Dart and other young artists - 'to get them started'. At this point Leila sounds like a 'real businesswoman' to Mr. Donegal, Dart's father, who finds it 'an admirable quality, especially in an artist' p.42/II. The slightly mocking attitude of Erica Jong towards Mr. Donegal, the accomplished WASP, who often says things as if he were the final arbiter, is also a real break with the conventional belief that women artists are not big earners. The strong clash of WASPdom versus Jewishness is acted through attitudes to money as well as social mores:

I wanted to tell Mr. Donegal that his immediate association of Jews with bad taste and moneygrubbing was not only anti-Semitic but a cliché unworthy of his intellect. [p.43/II]

What prevails in Leila's attitude towards money is her strong distaste of all money-addicts - whether tycoons or lovers; gallery owners or Grand Venice Ball celebrities. Whenever Leila is to mingle with them she is necessarily alarmed and appalled and eventually far and away from them. Erica Jong's further disagreement with the contemporary addiction of moneymaking creates and introduces a side character of an artist, a male one though, Wayne Riboud. Wayne is the Nevada biker who has become the flavor of the month by meticulously reproducing dollar bills, yen, francs, and lire, and trading them for necessities like food and clothing. Eventually it has become quite fashionable in New York to hang money on the walls. Thus the conceptual artist also sets not only a sensation but an artistic and social trend, reflecting the pressing issue of our contemporary culture. Here is his credo, which speaks for itself:

Nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of American public. That's why I sell them money. I used to do sensitive nudes and still lives, Turner-esque luminescent skies, mad Pollockian abstractions. None of your arcane symbolism here. Pass the buck: that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know. [p.75/X]

The world of winners - McCrae's Party and the Grand Venice Ball

Here we are right in the middle of the novel and the Party of Andre McCrae - Leila's and Wayne's gallery dealer, in New York at Seventy-fourth and Fifth. We are probably looking forward to entering in the world of the winners/millionaires once again in the closing chapter. It is where the Grand Venice Ball begins and the novel ends. Perhaps there is an added value of this non-accidental narrative architectonics - the book is on an alert about this issue, the narrator is bitterly ironic and the woman artist is struggling to differentiate herself from the glittering names and the world of winners. Leila, who boasts of being a winner finds herself on the side of the losers

in the world where there is no other criteria but money. And the biting sarcasm targets the usual bunch of mock-heroes, hanging always at Andre's parties:

There is always a smattering of royalty, a hint of Hollywood, a major media celebrity who mounts the news, a press lord or two, a Wall Street tycoon or two, a real estate baron or two - all appropriately wived in women who come (like certain designer dresses) only in sizes two to eight. Double digits are out. [75/X]

A neat structural parallelism could be run in-between the two events. The Grand Ball where 'all the mythical figures' are to be seen stepping down from their boats - 'Lacroix rustling Givenchy, Ungaro fluttering past Lagerfeld, Rhodes glittering near Valentino, Ferre flitting past Saint Laurent' (p.328/XX) is just the predictable grander follow-up of McCrae's party. Even the descriptive stylistics is in a way an extension of what we know about those glittering people and places from the art dealer's party. What seems quite obvious to the sane mind of Leila now is the grim truth about their harried, married, nervous faces. The big money-makers seem 'so nail-bitingly tense, so frantic, so fearful'. E. Jong is eager to draw another parallel: in-between hers and F. Scott Fitzgerald's treatment of this issue. Back in the twenties the rich used to have fun while nowadays being rich seems like a job. Jong is all the time conscious that her woman artist doesn't belong to this club, that the rich are different from 'you and me'. Yet Jong's concern about enjoying oneself is crucially connected with the word 'idle' and then expressed in her rhetorical question 'Where did the adjective 'idle' go?' [329/XX]

Idleness is positively gone, but idleness is whereabouts artists live in, although idleness no longer couples with richness. Richness also means one of those 'marriage-is-a-business marriages' so dear to the hearts of New York's New Money Elite. Such a couple 'own things together rather than fuck. This is their form of sex'. Such an ideal couple are the McCraes - Andre and Sally, who are extensively ridiculed within their own setting as hosts to the Party.

Woman artist's proper millionaire

Yet as if to prove it right or wrong there is another ideal marriage about to happen for nobody else but Leila. A whole chapter is devoted to the way this 'proper' marriage starts and the way it ends up. The XXII chapter opens with the most appropriate name and motto as if to introduce Mr. Right Man, the would-be husband of Leila, as 'The Proper Millionaire'. He is the one who could most 'happily' tune in the album of Calvin Carter I Ain't Got You, 1955. 'I got an Eldorado Cadillac/with a spare tire on the back-/ I got a charge account at the Goldblat's/ but I ain't got you'. [201/XII]

The proper millionaire is always referred to as Danny Doland from Dallas. The persistent triple D-alliteration may ironically conjure up the most 'affectionate' feelings towards someone who could drive a Porsche and be 'tall, fifty, funny, and absolutely loaded'. Danny Doland from Dallas could as well be 'the answer to a ten-year-olds' prayers', i.e. Leila's twin daughters, who are eager enough to ask their

Mom to marry him. Yet it is no mistake Leila has been 'madly in love' with Danny Doland from Dallas, which somehow spoils our concept of a business marriage. Yet what we experience is the cynical Jong's account of what eventually went wrong. Danny Doland from Dallas who collected everything was on the top of it all willing to consider acquiring Leila, as well. And so he tried. And thus he failed. Leila proves she could not resist either his straightforward properness nor his being a millionaire. Being about to find her own inner-self Leila is absolutely furious to realize her life as a part of that collection, 'the right art collection'.

On these grounds, it is perfectly enough for the woman artist to make up her sane mind and go home. Yet, at this final point Jong's irony is still playing some tricks on Leila. Leila finds herself realizing her own despair at the most proper place - properly drunk, alone at the huge wine cellar of Danny Doland from Dallas. The revelations are linger around and make Leila drive home. This comes at just the right time for the famous woman artist to be picked up as a news-item, as a news-myth by making a hot headline in the *New York Post* or Time Booked for drunk driving in the Berkshires, noted artist Leila Sand pleaded guilty to charges of operating a vehicle under the influence [216/XII]

Leila is stone cold sober enough at this point to rationalize and mock the press media myth-making tricks. What is more her social unadaptability motivates her to say 'No' to Lionel, a rich collector, money-addict and Andre's close friend. Leila says 'No', although he is offering her twice her fee for a painting - and with no commission and 'a nice little chance to beat the IRS'. We must note that this is the only instance where Leila's art is literally appreciated in financial terms. The abundance of moneywise remarks are quite subversive in terms of the popular perception of the strong, influential woman artist. For a moment Leila is 'tempted' to accept it since she is experiencing the 'cash-flow problems all artists experience now and then'. For a moment Leila is tempted to act like all artists do but she is also aware of her own principles which are far from 'morality or patriotism'. Her woman artist 'genes' prove to be more stubborn. The woman artist in her appears stronger once again. She knows that Lionel is using her to beat Andre, that once again she is caught in a 'male power play' and Leila is definitely motivated to act on the side of all women artists, growing weary of their mythological status of being passive pawns in the male battles.

...and the truth is I don't want to give Lionel this satisfaction. I'm sick of the way men use women as pawns in their battles with each other - and I don't want to be manipulated even if it puts money in my own pocket. [p.242/XV]

What is even more annoying is Lionel's clear disregard for Leila's works. He barely ever looked at them. His abusing attitude finds its ridiculous explanation: 'Paintings that good you don't have to look at', says Lionel. [242/XV.]

It becomes evident that both Lionel and Andre - Leila's dealer - are the symptoms of 'everything wrong with the art biz'. They know nothing about art and had no idea what they liked, nothing but what sold and the more it sold for, the more they liked

it. What is especially true of Andre could be easily transferred to Lionel as his double. It seems that Erica Jong's narrative is fond of running parallels as if to double the trouble. For the sake of sharp contrast Jong is juxtaposing Andre and Van Gogh as polar opposites.

Andre will never be [Van Gogh] and therefore hopes he can either buy or destroy: 'inner fire, inner certainty, the driving force of a genius' [251/X]. By the close of our 'social review' on money matters and women artists we could be pretty sure that buying an artist is equal to destroying her/him. This is made obvious by the either...or linkage and the first and only usage of the word genius in the text, referring to a male genius of van Gogh, though. The powerful play of the recurrent inner semi-rhyme liked/died is also very explicit of the wrongdoings of art business. If it sold a lot and the artist died, Andre liked it best of all. His idea of a perfect artist was a dead artist - preferably one who had died at the height of his fame. Hence the abuse of artists by art/money dealers as a pressing issue is deliberately exposed to subtle social critique in Jong's narrative.

Perhaps it is no longer so weird that an artist is virtually an outcast and a rebel in such a society. We will be soon scrutinizing all the novelistic evidences that will further advocate this outcast life-style of artists. Although it is primarily adhering to the views and myths about artists of Romanticism but we will find out that they are however applicable to Post-modernism as well. The novelty is certainly the introduction of women artists who are quite eager to aspire to the realm once reserved to Kubla Khans only.

S&M and blackness as social metaphors

Yet another big social issue is conveyed in the same bitter vein of expression. This is the underground world of S & M dominatrix, where Leila is taken supposedly to be shown 'the essence of our society'. Leila is taken to Madame Ada's Psychodrama Institute by her fellow-artist Wayne who actually needs to share his cynicism and pain with Leila. This is a semi-secret place with respect to anonymity and darkness, a place 'dedicated to the dark gods'. Its darkness could probably be interpreted as a prelude to a world in black through which this woman artist is trying to find her identity. The world in black is the consistent monochrome vision of Leila for the immediate inner/outer reality which is a perfect match for her artistic and social sensibility of a woman artist. Madame Ada opens the doors of her Institute as if ushering the artists in hell. The hellish imagery is extended further to children playing with power and pain, 'in despair because their limited notion of sexual love had failed them...' [281/XVIII]. Even Leila is tempted to be like Ada 'to be a bitch who could command men'. The twisted, negative connotation of bitch is brought to focus by the demolition power of the summoned dark gods:

I give myself to Kali - I who formerly loved Demeter and Persephone. Whoever is

not a cynic at forty can never have loved mankind.[273/XVII]

The eternal forces that are driving Leila's creativity, that make her create and destroy at the same time, are all to be found in Kali, as well as in the mother/daughter mythological couple of Demeter/Persephone. Thus Leila is to face both the good and the bad girl in herself, even at an odd place like Madame Ada's. One certainly needs to be a cynic to cope with the social pressure of an S & M dominatrix which is further reflected in the euphemism that stands for such a place - a Psychodrama Institute. Leila and Wayne certainly need to be artists to cope with it in their own artistic way. Wayne is anxious to liken himself to a real contemporary British artist of note, known for his apocalyptic visions - Francis Bacon. While Wayne wants to be the Francis Bacon of S & M since 'it's critical that someone finds a way to make it into art', Leila knows that is not what she wants. Once back home, away from New York and its S & M, she wants to learn how to love - no matter how many times she fails, no matter how unworthy the objects, no matter what betrayals she experiences. Perhaps the S&M episode is just the pretext for her to come back home to her sane mind. It seems that all her adventures and mental trips tend to end up questioning her personal identity. This is the first time Leila needs to open her diary and to put down the first entries of stray thoughts 'like threads snagged by a crochet hook in the little marbled notebook'. This is the notebook bought once in Italy by which the novel is closed. It also contains Leila's significant drawing of the faun/fauness, the only one reproduced in the novel. Thus the exclusive notebook could be considered as a special key image that is likely to reveal and initiate us in the new periods of Leila's life:

For nothing but love is worth the passage of life... Writing in this notebook is love, feeding my twins is love, nourishing my roses is love, painting is love...
[281/XVIII]

This new period of Leila is most definitely associated with something as bright as her crystal and maenads period (see later), which is the thorough contrast of the world in black. This is the positive personal alternative of woman artist to the inevitable negative connotations of black - dark, dim, dismal, dingy, evil. We can perhaps once again attribute modes of mythological thinking to Erica Jong. Jong's social structure seems to be set in terms of binary oppositions, typical of the mythological thinking: black/white; male/female. Although such a structure is appealing and convenient to Erica Jong she is also busy with subverting it. For Leila black doesn't necessarily stand for anything bad. Back at MA, in the early 1960s, she is 'dressed all in black (stockings to stocking cap), squired by a black boyfriend' (p.52/II) but she has also learned that 'blacks had the secret key to America's heart of darkness'.

Bessie Smith who 'knew all there was to know about womanhood' was also one of those blacks who held that key. Moreover Bessie Smith proves the most consistent role/soul model for Leila throughout the years. Further on Bessie Smith's lyrics are given prominence in relation to Leila's professional ID.

In Leila's early picture of the world in black the rebels and the outcasts, i.e. the artists and blacks are of highest rank and value. The young girl is opposing and fighting the white boys off with her 'wicked sarcasm and prodigious talent' (p.53/II). If her reality turns not to be coloured in black the rebellious young artist is there to paint it black. So she painted the windows black of a mansion, set up by her first husband Thom, and 'turned it into a slum - all in name of art and social revolution' (p.55/II). Elmore Dworkin - an artist proper, Leila's second husband, and father of the twins Mike and Ed - is another 'dark-eyed anarchist who wore his dark hair long' (p.58,9/II). A dark lady needs to fall in love with a proper dark lad. If by any chance Leila's lovable boys and husbands turn to be white they are as if deliberately made to wear black. This is how the much anticipated Dart enters the story physically for the first time:

Arrives Dart, helmeted, wearing black leather jeans and black leather jacket and black ostrich-leather boots with needle toes. ...my warm body against the wind-chilled smoothness of his black leather. [p.12/I]

The haunting repetitive occurrence of black is somehow both a praise and a threat to the innermost aspirations of Leila. For Leila is at once aspiring to love Dart and to set herself free of the addiction to Dart in order to teach herself of self-love. Perhaps this controversial feeling could be detected in the metonymy of Dart's black leather which obviously stands for his body. Body against leather is the first touch of Leila to Dart in the story. Warm Leila against wind-chilled Dart - and their love story rolls on to the point where Dart starts to wear white and turns into a disgusting view. This happens only once, in Leila's dream. He is all in white silk - white silk jeans and white silk cowboy shirt as a doll man. Leila is quite appalled by her 'disgusting dream' as if realizing how crucial it becomes when a colour trades its place with another. In her dream however even Dart's penis - another metonymy for him - trades its place with a 'deep gash which is crawling with earthworms, slugs, snails, as a doll man'. Leila pushes the doll man aside and looks for the way out of 'the Land of Fuck'. 'There is no door. Just this cage high above the city - New York? New Heaven - where I am trapped for ever'. [84/V]

Suddenly the Land of Fuck is no longer worth visiting. The woman artist is trapped like a bird in a cage. She needs to find the way out of this world in white, or black, or of money; she needs to find her sane mind.

The twin obsessions of our age - addiction and narcissism

However Leila's adventurous road to knowing herself turns to some more of the obsessions of our age. As a woman artist Leila Sand is overwhelmed and haunted by the inevitable contemporary addictions to the phone, the car, the motorcycle. All of the addictions are extremely interiorized and given a particular significance throughout the narrative. Although Leila is trying to learn to live in another state: moderation, the golden mean, she experiences herself as an addict - to the phone, to Dart, to her car. Although the golden mean feels boring to her, she knows it is the

secret of life. She knows that in a society that worships addiction one can hardly find a nonaddicted life. There is an army of addicts around her. Lionel is an addict too - addicted to taking over companies. Dart is also not so different from Lionel's passion to take over companies or Andre's to take over artists.

Consume, Consume, Consume. The bottomless pit of wanting. These are our values, and that is the world we have made. Never have we needed nonattachment more. [244/XV]

By the hasty triple repetition the reader can recognize the intensity with which Erica Jong confronts the culture of consumerism. Her woman artist is definitely one that both belongs and fiercely fights against it. She is also an expert in the bottomless pit of wanting someone. She knows the narcissism of being desired, the thrill of making someone fall in love with her.

The telephone as the household god

What seems the most assuring of her narcissism is her steady relationship of addiction to her telephone. It is even provocative to follow the animation of the phone within the love affair of Leila and Dart. Whenever Dart is not available, the phone is. Thus Leila's phone acquires the mythological status of the 'household god'. Here are the two God-like figures, Dart and the phone, properly featured with God-like imagery, that are so dear and affectionate to Leila's heart. 'Panic grips' Leila's heart at the thought of going into the city and leaving the telephone unattended. (p.138/IX). Even the novel opens with Leila 'in the grip of an obsession' with the telephone. 'I sit here by the phone (which may in fact be out of order) and wait for his call.[p.9/I]

And thereafter runs the gripping story of Dart and Leila. Even the persistent use of grip in the book invokes our readers' perception of the strong woman, who takes and keeps a firm, powerful hold of her...addictions.

Leila cherishes an intimate relation with her phone, too. There is a telephone in her silo - a 'secret' one, the one only Dart and Emmie have the number of. This is her sacred silo studio which is made even more unattainable to the ordinary world by the secret phone. Despite our expectations that Leila will transcend her phone addictions, the end of the novel surprisingly brings us back to the outset of the story. Even though Leila has been trying to run away from the phone, she is alarmed and would have gone 'crazy' if the phone never rang (324/XIX). Leila's intimacy with the phone develops to some weird mystical point. She is able to make Dart call by wishing. Erica Jong's satire is at its full swing when Leila is no longer able to 'create dynamite by the sheer force of longing', when the phone gradually turns from a good-natured god into mischievous, destructive one.

Anyway, the first woman who perfects that technique is going to win the Nobel Prize for Women...Waiting by the phone - that old female pastime - has got to be of all distaff griefs the worst. It is the powerlessness, the sense of being out of control, that annihilates. Breathe on the phone. Make it ring. Pull on the old umbilicus and make it pulse. [234/XIV]

This is what Leila is struggling to avoid throughout the novel - winning this Nobel Prize. Yet she is aware that all women are just too keen to stick to that phone addiction. The subtle alliteration in distaff griefs brings an air of ancient female character to that addiction, conjuring the conventional imagery of weaving and spinning, usually associated with women and housework [Smith 1994]. Those associations are further increased by the short imperative sentences which seem to cast some black magic on the phone. Even the special pick up of a strong anatomical word like umbilicus to denote the utmost attachment and the heavy dependency in a close relationship is suggestive of the twin obsession of our age.

Erica Jong's humorous way of treating those current social issues seems the only way out of despair and didacticism. The readers are welcome to take pleasure from a mock-heroic episode with Lionel and his portable phone as anti-heroes. Precisely at the moment Lionel is about to enjoy the feast in Leila's garden there comes the loud beep beep beep from the handmade Florentine briefcase of his. Precisely at the peak moment, at the sacred silo studio of Leila, when he reaches down and stars to unzip his fly, his briefcase beeps again. Yet to keep the readers laugh on, Jong 'makes' Lionel keep one hand on his fly and the other on the telephone, and thus his 'proxy fight' continues. Lionel is plugged into his addiction again and Leila is left to reflect on the immense destructive implement of the telephone.

More destructive than a machine gun or bullwhip. Suddenly the feast is turned to gall. This is a world they've made, a world in which sex is always interrupted by proxy fights, and they love it. [243,7/XV]

Apart from the annihilating powerlessness for a strong woman artist such an addiction could bring painful alienation, too. The telephone numbers collected by Leila through the years are all stored in her Filofax and Rolodex notebooks and cards. Yet they are made obsolete by the time she takes a grip on her life. They are turned into a testament to mutability. And thus the feeling of mutability predominates in Leila's relation with the phone. There is nothing but problems lurking behind each of the Filofax names, problems and untold depths of 'fear of intimacy, fear of commitment, fear of falling, fear of flying, fear of fucking!' (256/XVI) And the scissors of the collage-making Kali/Leila go over the Filofax as if to assure us of her creative/ destructive power. We are drawn by the strength of Leila's snipping and pasting Filofax pieces as if under a black magic spell again. And the sense of alienation as another obsession of our age is bursting out from the extensive list of old female fears. We can possibly argue that all E. Jong's creative women are trying their best in overcoming those haunting fears, in transcending the 'eternal' womanhood.

The drug of travelling

Erica Jong is also consistently concerned with the overwhelming need of travelling around in our culture. In our age travel has become a 'drug'. There are people who grow so used to coming and going that they find it impossible to stand

still. If they are not boarding a plane and going somewhere, they feel somehow bereft - 'like a gambler deprived of his chips, or an addict of his needle, or a sexoholic of her marble cock.' The similes are all drawn from the 'drug-store' of images, which basically recall the drug-addiction at once arousing the negative essence of any addiction. One could perhaps realize how sensitive Erica Jong and her woman artist are to the fear of flying even in its literal meaning once again in *Any Woman's Blues*. There is one airport scene when Leila is to collect her daughters Mike and Ed from a holiday away with their father. Airports have always affected Leila deeply, made her want to cry. Even though it is a jolly occasion for her to meet the twins, her fear-ridden heart and mind are fixated on the inevitable troubles, on the losses and restrictions of all those arrivals and departures. The 'ill-fitted fragments' of people's lives going off to hang suspended above are likened to a puzzle, which Leila hasn't got the key for.

What she holds the key for are the two vehicles, featured in the novel as extensively as a couple of human characters. These are the car and the motorcycle that Leila have bought for Dart. The deliberate exaggeration and the animation of the images could be traced even in the numberplate which pertinently reads DART. It seems that E. Jong pursues some metonymical identification of Dart with those darting machines. We can dare compare their god-like omnipresence to the household god, the telephone, except for their outdoors function. The very opening of the novel could run that parallel in our minds. Leila, in a grip of an obsession, listens for the sound of Dart's motorcycle 'spraying pebbles on the curving driveway path' (p.9/1), as she is waiting for his call. In the course of the relationships Leila/Dart and Leila/her other addictions there comes a glorious midsummer Connecticut day when Leila takes possession of the car she bought for Dart.

With its oxblood exterior, its white leather seats, its new sound system, and its rebuilt engine, it drives like a wet dream. But Dart has made a mess of the interior, as he makes mess of everything. A rebuke to his woman's money, because he didn't earn it. His mess infuriates me, and the fury gives me a power to drive to New York. The gas is incidental. [p.138/IX]

The description of Dart's car is as vivid and colourful as that of Dart, the troublemaker. The simile of the wet dream is necessary to remind us of the archaic eroticism implied in boats, cars, trains, etc. The wet dream of Dart however fails to achieve its erotic mess-age, it actually remains just another mess of Dart's. Ironically this mess and the fury, rather than the gas, can fuel and propel Leila's road to non-attachment towards Dart and to lead her to herself. What could even speed her up on the way to herself is the trustworthy voice of Bessie Smith - there are two sets of complete Bessie Smith - records for home and cassettes for the car. It seems Leila's road to New York is also incidental. Actually she heads for New York as the place where she can re-claim herself as an extraordinary woman artist.

Leila Sand as an extraordinary woman - Women artists as lonely outcasts

The woman artist in E. Jong's narrative mind will keep being alienated as an outcast. Her creative woman will perhaps never be perfectly clear how close yet alienated we all are. Thus unsurprisingly the word alone could be perceived as another key through which to approach the social identity of Leila Sand. Leila is steadily convinced that we are all alone in our houses painting or writing or composing and phoning each other all over the world.

Each of us living alone and calling out through the cosmos to a network of living friends we seldom see; social life is conducted digitally; lovers we touch and smell, but friends we increasingly 'visit with' only electronically - even when we live few blocks away. The human race is preparing itself for space? [187,8/XI]

The rhetorical question makes us reflect on the up and coming digital myths of communication, on the idea that hi-tech art that will inadvertently take its place in the hierarchy of contemporary art values. Leila proves very much concerned about the way art and life will flourish now that they are turned over to the 'techie' and translated into computer language. Leila's concern is quite critical when it comes to the shift in values which such changes might bring. E. Jong's criticism is very sophisticatedly disguised in a series of amusing 'instead of' clauses:

Bytes instead of bites, input instead of intercourse, file instead of fuck. We'd all change directories and become blips on a flickering screen. Which we were anyway. In God's computer of starry blue. Instead of mothers, we'd have 'surrogates'; instead of fathers, we'd have 'donors'; instead of children, we'd have -what?

Glory and abysmal pity seem at the crux of our evolutionary dilemma. Perhaps we could blame the computers for our isolation while at the same time realize why the artists tend to stick to forms of art which are not aided by computers. Leila Sand seems very likely to ban all computers from her art as she is really fighting and ironizing all sorts of isolation. Her artist's credo seems focused on connection and abundance, rather than on scarcity and isolation.

The growing tendency for further isolation will result in the hilarious image of the artists as zoo animals. Perhaps this is the humorous view by which Erica Jong can beat away the social discontent. At Andre's parties, the artists appear like 'zoo animals on their best behaviour', always with the sense that their endeavours are 'vaguely peripheral' to the main event: the buying and selling of artworks. Leila is unromantic and realistic enough to understand the rules of the social game at the parties of the McCraes' - an artist's time and artist's work is of no worth - unless it is bartered by Andre - 170/X. The woman artist as a peripheral guest could rebel against this show both through her sarcastic words and her awkward presence. She is one of those zoo animals at Andre's parties who often get quickly drunk or stoned, pass out in the guest room or 'discretely throw up' in the powder room, perhaps 'nauseated by so much proximity to the beau monde to which their success has entitled them'.

The sarcasm is evident in the opposition of the two worlds set apart, yet brought so dangerously close at Andre's show. The artists will never be the hard-core of the social show, but will certainly always be a part of its sideshow.

Women artists' madness

It seems that old nineteenth Century social conventions are still valid for the late 1980s. Artists are still expected to act like maniacs and in this guise they mingle with the beau monde. It seems that both society and literature can't do without the character of the maniac, the one who always tends to undermine the social foundations by its excessive excitement and enthusiasm. The questionable, dubious and suspicious nature of those maniacs of artists could be tracked in the attitude of Andre: "Round up the usual suspects", he tells his secretary. 'See if the tsatskeleh will drive down from Connecticut and the biker will bike up from SoHo.' [171/X]

However in both of the 'flattering' words maniacs and suspects there is a borderline with the madman, the insane person, the lunatic. We can even argue that if the artists are the fools of our modern society [Darendorf 1969], the women artists are sort of crazy, mad women. There are number of references in the text that could support the view that Leila Sand is considered a mad woman. Yet her madness is her virtue; it is definitely perceived as something positive and valuable.

It is Theda, Leila's mother, that is credited for passing 'this crazed bravado', this positive notion that Leila can do anything. As a woman artist herself Theda's madness fired Leila's ambition in a creative way. It is Cordelia, Leila's ex-mate from her MA years who greets her old friend at her studio in Venice like that: 'I miss your madness, Zandberg' [298/XVIII]. Here madness rhymes with long-lasting friendship, with Leila's charm of an adventurous, self-empowering woman artist. Perhaps at this point Leila is able to confide to herself and to Cordelia that it is Danny Doland from Dallas who turned her into 'Leila the wild card suddenly tamed'. Leila needs to play her wild card, as much as her twins need their mother's wildness and love, too: 'She's cuckoo', says Mike to Ed, 'but lovable' [227/XIII].

Isn't it also quite appropriate a choice of E. Jong that the maenads are the leading figures in Leila's white still-lives. Those frenzied women are picked up as the symbols of Leila's new serene period. Hence the identification of the woman artist with her personae both asserts and contributes to her respectable wildness. It is also of great significance that Leila's sane mind is frequently metaphorically referred to as her maenads and crystals, although one can be upset by the oxymoronic replacement of sane with maenads. It is either because in Jong's mind sane no longer denotes only the rational, normal, sound and sober or because maenads stand for something beyond insanity, vehemence, rage and raving passion. Perhaps Leila Sand enjoys being both sane and insane woman artist. In the perspective of Wayne Riboud Leila is 'really nuts' when she tells him she is working on something else - on herself, on her sane mind, rather than going to use the S & M material in her oeuvre - 284/XVIII.

Leila is absolutely sure she needs to keep on painting because otherwise she'd 'go crazy'. This is the unwanted madness; the one that is not productive and inspiring but rather destructive to her identity of an artist. She doesn't want it, as she doesn't want to paint for money, nor does she want to be 'serviced' on the deserted islands of Fiji, Bali or Trobriands - the Isles of Love where Julian would like to take her [323/XIX]. Most of all Leila needs her risk-taking madness, her own ability to follow her talent 'off the edge of the cliff' and see if she can fly. It seems that the fear of flying could be defeated and mastered only through the madness of flying. This is also a test for her identity. It is only through such extraordinary mad passion for painting, writing and creating that Leila could figure out whether she is as exceptional as the ancient Greek heroes:

What's rare is to follow your talent into the underworld and see if you can sing your way out. What's rare is to follow your talent into the labyrinth and see if you can slay the Minotaur. Are you Icarus? Are you Orpheus? Are you Theseus? Or are just Bruce, condemned always to be Bruce.

This is how Wayne tries to encourage the young waiter Bruce - a would-be actor, to pass this mythological trial. Although Bruce fails the test it is Leila who eventually wins. The baffling passages of Leila's creativity labyrinth ask her to be as fearless warrior as the chief hero of Attica, Theseus, to go through the countless exploits of being a woman artist. She needs to slay the Minotaur of her addictions in order to set free the scared Icarus and Orpheus in herself. The expressive reference to the Greek mythology suggests yet again an implicit reading of Leila's character as a heroic one and her blues story as one of many courageous exploits and adventures. It may as well reassure us that women artists of the late 1980s are more like ancient heroes, rather than persons with established and respected role and place in the society. Women artists are certainly able to be more like 'wild women' than proper creative persons as male artists are. Even the ironic motto of Ida Cox, which closes the book is quite telling about the final outcome of Leila's exploits: 'Wild women don't have the blues because wild women don't worry' [p.327/XX]. It proves that lovable wildness is the only way out of the labyrinth of any woman's blues. Thus to be wild and artist in E. Jong's is the utmost life-affirming force. This is what Leila Sand's social myth stands for.

This issue could be related to the recently published study of *Sybille Duda Mad Women* [Duda 1995] - a collection of biographies of famous women who all ended up in mental institutions or isolation. In her preface S. Duda maintains that a hysterical woman is a prototype of a creative mad woman. Woman's madness is, according to Duda, a statement of protest against the social role imposed on her. In the case of Leila Sand it is a double protest of any contemporary woman - once through her madness and secondly through her being an artist. Taking into account M. Foucault's study on madness in thoughts, these women's destiny is a perfect implementation of a society outcasting the disturbing ones because they refuse 'to go by the book' or possess the authority and power desired by others.

The bitterness of women artists' success

Leila's desire to position herself as an outcast is further underlined by her self-sabotaging of her own success. She is not the 'normal' figure of a woman as victim. Leila becomes victimized and abused not because of her determination to create but because she becomes a successful artist. The social conventions of success place extra pressures on Leila - women are not supposed to win, to achieve the heights reserved for the male genius only. Leila is strong and modern enough to fight for her need to create but she remains weak in so far as she is not able to enjoy her achievements. Her first public victory brings her nothing but bitter embarrassment and the feeling of being punished for her success. In her self-sabotaging mind, like an archaic woman, just as she becomes an emerging artist, Elmore leaves her. 'I had fulfilled my destiny as an artist and a woman, and to punish me for that, Elmore had left'. [p.64/III]

He couldn't bear it, and neither, it seemed, could Leila. At fifty-five Elmore worried a lot - his heart, his penis, his career, all were failing - and on the top of it all Leila seems to be 'on the top of the world'. Evidently the prevailing mode here is the ironic uncertainty in the repetitive seem, which is further boosted by the subversive second-thought put in brackets.

It is much earlier, during her MA years, when Leila experiences the bitterness of her success. One of the four things she learns at MA is the Romantic persistent myth of the artist, as something still valid for America in the late 1980s: 'an artist was always an outcast and a rebel in bourgeois America - no matter what anyone said.' Whenever Leila wants the freedom to do her work, she ends up at 'this lonely pass'. She left Thom to have babies with Elmore, and left Elmore because eventually he 'sulked every time she put brush to canvas'. Leila needs to let Dart 'peel off' because she wouldn't do drugs with him anymore which leads her once again to that lonely pass. The topos of the lonely pass seems to embody the blues and the rage of any creative women. Yet E. Jong is definitely aware that her creative woman is caught at a particular moment by the strangeness of this historical moment.

In this unique moment in which it is obvious that nobody prepared this generation of women, the baby boomers, for all the changes that have overtaken them as women, because nobody knew how to prepare them. They wanted to have it all - work and love, paintings and babies - and they have had it, but they have paid a price: the price of loneliness and isolation. (p.139/IX)

Leila's generation of women were experimenting with a new life pattern, one never tried before in all of history. No wonder they felt so lost, 'alternatively like pariahs or like pioneers'. These are the women artists who were breaking every female taboo - putting their creative lives, their self-expression, ahead of the demands of the species. No wonder Leila feels like 'a traitor' to Elmore, to Dart. If it were 1920 or 1945, Leila would never have left Thom Winslow and pursue 'twins and twin careers in Chianti'. And if it were 1930 or 1955, she would never have left Elmore and would

up with Dart. The negative connotation of traitor here carries the 'self-sabotage myth' even further. The lives of their mothers and grandmothers simply did not apply. There are no rituals for them. They had smashed the old and not built the new [Campbell 1995]. They had 'unraveled the past and not woven the future'. Even through the typical women's imagery of fibers and entanglement there comes the suspense of the haunting question of how to make this rite of passage: 'How to do it? Ah - the question of the century'. [p.140/IX]

That is exactly the issue that bothers E. Jong most while re-creating the emerging identity of the new woman artist. It seems that Jong's particular approach is keen on evoking the historical background at which Leila's artistic life is set clearly. Besides being 'comforting' to see one's life as part of a historical process it ensures a broader perspective to the contemporary myth of women artists. No wonder the word 'victim' is controversially related to both negative and positive sides. Leila is partly a victim to her own addiction, partly a victim of her own talent and fame, but she is partly a casualty of history: 'too many women born and not enough men, no life patterns for any of us to live by, the family breaking down and being replaced by - what? Nothing.' [p. 140/IX]

However Leila is perfectly aware that at the fin-de-siecle men are just as lost and lonely as women. Men are vulnerable as well with all their vulnerability 'hanging so nakedly between their legs'. Even in the slightly degrading language one could feel the positive touch and understand why men cannot be blamed for being disaffected with the whole female sex. Frightened of their mummies, of shrieking women - 'all they ask is a little softness and tenderness from us' -165/X. No wonder armies of screaming women on the march terrify them. While reflecting on this issue Leila is definitely sure she would react with terror and with rage if she were a man. In her sane mind she knows she would. As usual Leila is not at all short of humour and joy when she is to handle the issue of men/women struggle. From the high level reflections on the historical process we are back to the basics:

They (Men) expected nurturance and got a kick in the balls. They expected us to be warm bodies in bed, cups and cup bearers, baby bearers - and then they had to listen to kvetch about our blasted creativity. They wanted what they had always had: a warm tush in bed. How could a still life of maenads and crystal ever replace a warm tush in bed? The Warm Tush Theory: All history could be traced to the longing for the warm tush in bed.

The Blasted Creativity Theory: All history of the contemporary myth of women artists could be traced in it, as well as the story of *Any Woman's Blues*. Perhaps the longing is to have it all - the warm tush in bed and the maenads and crystals together. At some point the answer seems to be within reach - sailing to the Trobriands islands, the Isles of Love, as they were called in the twenties. It is Julian, Leila's spiritual alter-ego, who believes that the formula of the deserted island myth could save them - the artists from the hostility of the outcasting world around. Although Julian is

conscious that the Isles of Love are 'just another noble-savage myth' he still dreams of going there. Julian is so influential while persuading Leila to join him that he makes her think of 'the layers of myth-making - Gauguin, Robert Louis Stevenson, Melville, Michener'. Despite the long run of their friendship Leila will eventually disagree with Julian and his utopia. She will stick to the deserted island in her mind. Even by thinking of the twins Leila could be reminded of her lonely place. As a mother of two Leila often envied them - their self-sufficiency, the fact they were never lonely. United against the world, they go to school, to Daddy's, to Mommy's. As their mother she is glad for their connection but it leaves her out 'in some deeply painful way'. Sometimes Leila wished she had a singleton for company. Jong extends these longing further through the mythical implications of the numbers 1 & 2. 'One is the indivisible number. But one is lonely. Two is divisible but unafraid.' [221,2/XIII]

Her own oneness and loneliness is what Leila is struggling to come to terms to. In her crystal clear period she is usually described in the silo alone, looking over the hills of Connecticut and painting. Sometimes in bliss, sometimes in despair. This duality of the artist's loneliness is something you cannot communicate to another living soul. Perhaps that is the reason why Leila decides not to fall in bed with the Waynes and Darts of this world. Then what is there left for her but this 'endless solitude before the easel.' Leila both loves and hates it. She needs to live in this dual state of mind as she needs to thank God for giving her a livelihood out of this solitary bliss, and to curse God for 'the gut-wrenching loneliness of it'. At parties she misses this blissful solitude, but at the same time she thinks she's missing 'Life' by not going to the parties. This controversial artistic identity of Leila will prove to be her truest one, the much sought-after social identity of hers. Here is the self-portrait of Leila that could give us another insight to the innerside of her social personae.

Me, at the easel, overlooking the hills, smelling the primal turpentine smell, stoned on my own solitude and the woodsy aroma of the solvent, of the hydrocarbon high of the painting alone and the low of knowing I may be alone for the rest of my life. [183,4/XI]

The zeugma effect conveyed through the use of 'stoned on' with different fields of reference could contribute a lot to the care-free and joyful perception of Leila's portrait. Alongside with the touch of self-irony Leila is yet earnest to build up a self-portrait of a self-empowering woman artist who is beginning to love herself. It is not only Leila but her work that is lovable, too. People love her work because of the joy and the life force that comes through. Her work is really abundant in life and emotions. But anyway for Leila the essence of her life is her art.

That is why she needs to fight for her right to create and succeed. She knows that the struggle between art and life is a never-ending one. She knows that it is difficult enough for the man who is not 'indentured to the species very survival'. But for a woman, who is socially enslaved, this struggle is a 'true dilemma and conundrum, never to be resolved - until, perhaps, the freedom of menopause that

Emmie talks about' [p.122/VII]. From the hint on the much misconceived issue of the menopause E. Jong is further enlightened to summon the chthonic deities who are driving the course of this archaic female struggle to create [Orenstein 1994]. Her woman artist is acutely aware that every canvas she has 'seized from the chaos' has been done on the expense of the chthonic deities who 'cry out for blood, blood, female blood and childbirth at any price'. Then E. Jong is able to claim that any woman producing any painting should get combat pay - 'for the battle waged in the sky between Rhea and Zeus'. Can we project in this summoning of Rhea and Zeus - the supreme deities of the creativity myth in the Greek Pantheon - the need for validation in a world in which being a woman is not in itself enough validation? Is this Jong's way of validating womanhood and creativity.

I would never have an abortion because I see every egg as an incipient human life, and I could no more destroy one than I could rip apart my own canvas. [p.123/VII]

Perhaps Leila Sand is an artist who is learning to validate herself in every facet of her creativity both as a mother and an artist, both in her social and personal aspirations.

Women Artists' Professional Identity

Set on a quest of women artists' myth of today we will eventually confront Leila Sand's professional identity. Gradually we will become woven in the narrator's web of motifs, time and space references that allude to women's art. We will face the five W's once again - who is that lady; how is a piece of art created; whereabouts is it done; what is it like; whom is it addressed to. Unsurprisingly it will take us five sections to provide some of the answers. We will find out why both the legacy of sketching and the secret shrine of the studio will take an almost mystical significance in the novel; why the cliché of art periods in artists' careers is not valid for Leila; why all her periods and works reflect her diverse emotional life; why does the narrator need to reclaim other women artists. Then our aim will be to figure why the blur of art and life is so essential for Leila's creativity and thus sum up the features of the upcoming myth of women artists.

The key motif of sketching

We tend to think that artists are not overdoing or overtiming themselves in their professional activities; that their creative process is much more of a hedonistic idling than working. However there are number of examples in Erica Jong's narrative that her woman artist breaks this mythical misconception of ours. Her Leila Sand can hardly fit the cliché of the bohemian artist. She is basically conceived as a hardworking artist, a 'very disciplined worker'. Leila's professional identity seems to be focused on the motto that 'No artist gets anywhere otherwise' [p.22/I]; that no contemporary artist could achieve success and satisfaction without hard days' work. Probably it is not accidental that the piece of art is etymologically rooted in our minds as a work of art.

The serious efforts of an artist who aims to be at the 'crest of the wave at the moment' could be traced as back as the time when Leila was four. Her efforts culminate in the recurrent use of a particular word, denoting the domain of creativity. 'I was sketching, sketching, sketching. I don't remember a time when I didn't draw. I could always 'get a likeness'.' [p.50/III]

Moreover from the moment Leila met Dart, she was sketching him - p.66/III. Thus we will soon realize that the key word sketching is fundamental for the build-up of Leila's character of a woman artist. We will soon realize how special and suggestive it is for Leila's personality. It seems that through sketching, through creating, the woman artist could transcend time and reality. The metaphoric notion of a single time-frame or a mythological timeless in which the act of sketching is set invokes the sacred nature of creativity. Sketching is more than a lifelong occupation for Leila, it is conceived as a ritual, lifestyle and philosophy. Perhaps we won't be surprised that there is a blend of fiction and faction in sketching. A brief look at the autobiography *Fear of Fifty* [Jong 1994/a] will reiterate E. Jong's major focus. It is Leila's grandfather - a prosperous portrait painter and a commercial artist with a 'sprinkling' of famous clients - who was 'always sketching his past as he lived his present'. That was the legacy he left for his disciple, for any creative woman. 'Just keep sketching. Try not to ask why. There may not be an answer.' [Jong 1994/a, p.73]

This is how sketching is handed down from one generation to the next in the manner of a family myth maintaining itself. Thus it is no wonder that further on in E. Jong's writing the semantic string of sketch - sketching, sketchbook, scratching will keep being the key opener for Leila's professional identity.

The legacy of writing

The gift of writing is also viewed alongside the gift of drawing and the need to sketch by Jong. We can possibly assume that E. Jong's vision of women artists is a broad-scale one as a vision any creative woman, who is free and gifted enough to aspire to various disciplines, to visual arts, to music, to literature. So that next to drawing, writing activates Leila's alternative self, the self of the writing woman artist, the woman artist-of-letters. It is also symptomatic of this close relationship between writing and visual art that eventually, by the close of the novel *Leila*, the artist, decides to give up painting '(because it is so much a product of my narcissism)' to become a writer. She finds herself in a state of grace, with her mask stripped off, when she eventually seems to discover her identity as a woman, 'propelled by an unseen muse', with her pen 'scratching in her sketchbook' [p. 345,6/XX]. However Leila Sand fails to give up painting altogether. She keeps covering 'pages and pages with pictures and words' before she falls asleep that night. What is most important for her is that she needs to accomplish her creativity by all means of expression. It is not that writing is any easier than painting. But for Leila it is a pleasure at first, because it is a sort of holiday from expectations, a hobby, not for sale, 'not to be bartered by Andre', Leila's art dealer [p.280/XVIII]. This radical shift is somehow anticipated and prompted by a number of images and novel characters.

The image of the marbled sketchbook

The marbled note/sketchbook stands alone amongst those images. Once bought in Italy seems to be kept for a long time before it can match the easel and the canvas as their proper equivalent. The longing to write somehow has turned this notebook into a mythologema. What is more alongside with the first entries of words, the 'little notebook with the marble paper cover' is the only real drawing of Leila offered within the text. This is her revelatory version of the faun and fauness, of the nymph-and-satyr that provides the notebook with extraordinary mythological depth, as well as an optimistic ending to the novel *Any Woman's Blue*. We virtually experience a book within a book, a marble notebook of poetry and scratchings within a book, which recreates the women artists' myth in the format of the book.

Isadora Wing and Emily Quinn - women-of-letters

On the level of Jong's development of her characters we can interpret the important role played by Isadora Wing, the established poetess and the 1970s protagonist in *Fear of Flying* [Jong 1973] and *How to Save Your Own Life* [Jong 1977]. Obviously Erica Jong can't help projecting her ex-heroine into the ongoing narrative of *Any Woman's Blues*. As a result we have Leila Sand who is punctuated passim with the interruptions of Isadora Wing, arguing with Leila Sand (the author arguing with her protagonist - with herself, in short) which suggests that all the prior novelistic experiences and characters really matter; that they can even make us believe it is the same old story, the same old myth of E. Jong. So that the interaction of the two main characters within Erica Jong's story can be treated as a sort of myth into myth structure or 'Chinese boxes within boxes, or Russian dolls within dolls, or an onion peeling back its skin', if we are to rely on the novel's self-awareness of telling a tale of no end in the very closing line of the Afterword by Isadora Wing [Jong 1991, p.362]

Another woman-of-letters is Emily Quinn - Leila's best friend, a writer of non-fiction books on trendy subjects, working on 'the first no-holds-barred book on menopause for the 1990s'. Emmie's role throughout the story is that of another self-empowering creative woman who guides Leila towards self-love and respect, providing her with the coziness and safety of a woman-to-woman relationship.

Contemporary Pop Lit Myths

The myths found in contemporary popular literature are also relevant to Leila's search for selfhood. Leila Sand proves not only a self-confident writer but a sophisticated, critical reader. Her bitter reflections on Popular Literature, another strong addiction, create a lot of sheer humour which are like Isadora's fierce arguments.

So I turned to Pop Lit. *Femme 101. Women Who Love Too Much; Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them; Smart Women, Foolish Choices...* all

the books that promise relief from man addiction. The books were something. They told you everything that was wrong with your relationship (heavily implying that it was all your fault) but they didn't tell you how to find a good relationship. [p.164/X]

Erica Jong argues vigorously that those popular Do-it-yourself manuals could do nothing else but consolidate further the popular notion of the woman as a victim, who is always 'hooked on a heartless bastard'. Isn't it even more convenient and profitable to stick to the conventional myth of the passive woman, who is supposed always to behave. Let the man continue misbehaving. He never needs to be entirely ready to give up his addictions, but she does. Jong's serious concern is suddenly complemented by a hilarious remark: 'At times I thought these books were part of a conspiracy of female authors to get other women's men'. This theory of Leila crashes into the fact that some of these books were written by men, although never for men. In her ongoing speculations Leila keeps her humour and her personal integrity of an artist who doesn't match the pop lit myths, which most probably were written by homosexuals, 'hoping to spring loose a few more men who are now disaffected with the whole female sex'.

Bessie Smith's lyrics

Bessie Smith's lyrics could also be interpreted as another key opener to Leila's personality. Bessie, the Empress of the Blues, Leila's heroine is undoubtedly a mythological figure in herself. And more so when Bessie is credited at every chapter's opening with small quotes from her lyrics or by trading places in the main text with Isadora Wing and arguing fiercely with Leila. Moreover Bessie Smith is given the real prominence in the book's title taken from her *Any Woman's Blues* collection of songs.

On the other hand Bessie's songs are the ultimate voice of female pain predicting male unpredictability, declaring that nothing between man and women is new under the sun, and are represented as being the ultimate embodiment of the ever-cherished myth of the suffering woman. They are definitely not the answer to Leila's search of womanhood, or selfhood, nor her comfort. These are songs-questions 'reminding you that millions of women - black, white, yellow, and brown - have cried this way before you, have turned these griefs into rich, resonant song' [p. 86/V].

The secret shrine of woman artist's studio

Leila's professional identity needs to achieve itself in those various aspects of her sketching activities but what Leila needs as well is the secret shrine of a studio. L. Sand's studio is exactly where the novel opens and let us in:

I had a studio in Litchfield County - a silver silo with an observation-like skylight, studding my country acreage - and in New York I had my loft...So I would pace my studio-silo, trying to work, my peace of mind destroyed: listening for the phone; listening for his/my car...[p.23/I]

The alliteration of silver studio-silo, skylight, studding that welcomes us in prompts both some tension and concentration of power, as well as a full control of the light and the background. Our initial assumptions are soon confirmed with the witty simile of the studio/silo as Leila's 'obvious phallic symbol', which once had been her freedom, and then had become her prison.

A brief cross reference to E. Jong's grandfather and his studio, depicted in *Fear of Fifty* [Jong 1994/a] is worth mentioning. It too faced north, and was a place of refuge and of fear. It is also likened to a palace 'a west-side palace with north light'. Jong's mind seems focused on the power, exclusiveness and the higher, royal status of the artist who is presumably the awesome king in his palace. What is ever more striking to Jong's mind is the obvious abuse of her mother, a highly gifted but not prosperous painter when compared with her father. Erica's mother wasn't allowed in the palace but had to 'set up a folding easel when and where she could' [Jong 1994/a, p.29]. Although she 'resented that bitterly' Erica's mother failed to achieve or cope with her dreams of being a woman artist. It was at that time when it was a (male) mythical privilege to have a studio of one's own. Some twenty years later her daring daughter Erica/Leila seems to break the rule and fight for her own working space.

The studio of a silo proves to be the place where Leila belongs, where her art and love flourish. It is truly disastrous when her silo is traded for a 'mausoleum' of a studio. It is absolutely overwhelming to Leila's mind and heart of a painter when her third husband Danny Doland from Dallas, the proper millionaire, suggests for her 'a climatically controlled structure to preserve the art', with a perfect north light controlled by skylights, with special electronically operated sunshades. Even the proper gallery below this proper studio, meant to host of works by Leila and her major contemporaries - Graves, Bartlett, Schnabel, Sherman, Netkin, Frankenthaler, Twombly, Johns - could not convince her to stay. She proves an avid romantic who can hardly breathe in this immaculate studio. The metaphoric implications of air are to stress how vital and crucial is Leila's need of a studio.

But I want to charge the air, decontrol it, make it eddy around the spectator's eyes, make the shakti leap out of the picture and change your life.../Oh, that's such a romantic idea, sugar. Look - you just paint your little heart out and let me worry about preserving the work. [205,6/XII]

Leila's desperate need of an airy studio is definitely incommunicable to a 'considerate' man as Danny. The impossibility of a talk can even affect the stylistics of the paragraph above. Despite the framework of the dialogue, there is not a single correspondence between their lines of talk. Leila fails to imagine herself painting in Danny's dead place. It is appropriately compared to 'a mausoleum without air', without birdsong, without the occasional butterfly (or wasp) landing on her work-in-progress. Leila is just too 'horrified' when facing the rhetorical question: 'How could I create art without life to power it?' What proves power-generating for the new woman artist is not the building or the studio. It is her belief that nature is

essential for her art; that nature provides freedom, love, inspiration and plenty of poeticisms. Among the most recurrent images are those related to the sky and the sea. We can argue that the pivotal metaphor of creativity in Erica Jong's oeuvre - 'flying' once again couples with its opposite - the metaphor of swimming and diving. Leila Sand seems to confront all her fears of creativity on every space level, exploring every possible direction. Perhaps that is why she needs both the hillside and the sea, both Connecticut and Venice.

But if I can't look out and see the sky and the hillside, how can I create the art? I love to work here: far enough from the Monster Gotham not to hear its mental static, near enough to catch mammary hills - whether in Tuscany or Litchfield County, Umbria or the Veneto. The only thing I like better is the sea. The Mediterranean, the Pacific.. any sea will do.

Leila Sand proves positively addicted not to Danny but rather to her own studio in Litchfield County, Connecticut in which hills she never feels horrified but 'safe and mothered'. She prefers working in the country where the birdsong does not invade but rather accompanies her work.

Venice -the land of art

However Leila's personal choice of the mythical land of art is somewhat different from the ever cherished artistic venue of Paris. Her Paris is Venice, her France is Italy. Why not Paris? Because for her generation Paris is no longer the 'midwife' to the arts [Jong 1994/a, Jong 1992]. Henry Miller had to dream of Paris, as well as Jong's grandfather. The voice H. Miller discovers in Paris is full of the exuberance of escape: ...Paris is the cradle of artificial births. Everyone has lived here some time or another. Nobody dies here...[Miller 1992]

Leila's frequent visits to Venice are evidently motivated by the craving to touch both the sky and the sea. If we are to pick up just a single day of Leila's in Venice, it is never an ordinary hazy late-summer Sunday. It is rather a scene that 'Monet might have painted: a scrim of humidity softening the campanili, the sky, the water'. The attraction of painters and writers who flocked to Venice lay in the way in which air and water illuminate each other, and where air and water 'metamorphose moment by moment in a kaleidoscope of light'. Venice is perceived by the creative mind of the woman artist as the only city in which 'every view is three-quarters sky'. Thus Venice turns into the ultimate apotheosis of Leila's search of professional selfhood. This is her land of art and light, the land where she will be drawn irresistibly. By no accident in E. Jong's narrative Venice will stand symbolically for both life and death, for a beginning and an end. From the structural point of view Venice closes up the woman artist's story by virtually closing the final chapter of Any Woman's Blues. We could probably relate this deliberate choice of an ending to the rather bizarre relation Venice/death in the open question of Leila: 'Isn't Venice where artists go to die? To die in Venice would be, at least, artistically correct.' [p.290/XVIII]

Leila goes to Venice both to die and be reborn again as a phoenix from her ashes. At this point in the book, Leila is explicitly identified with the phoenix bird in the Afterword. In Venice and in the middle of her life Leila dies and is reborn, because at forty-five, 'you either perish or recreate yourself like a phoenix', p.351. Leila, the woman artist, seems to have been chosen for the latter course. And suddenly she sees Venice as if for the first time. Is it her search for serenity; is it sobriety, the triumph of the sane mind; is it her 'maenads and crystal' that echo with her new ID of a phoenix, with this fabulous mythological creature? [BBM 1993] Like it Leila combines the yin-yang powers, the solar and lunar energy, the male and female qualities. Unsurprisingly Leila is fascinated by the Venice light that drew Ruskin, Turner, Monet - and before that all the great male Venetian painters, from Carpaccio, Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese to Guardi and Canaletto. Perhaps thanks to these artists Venice has gained its popular reputation of the most romanticized, aesthetically packaged and photographed couple of square miles in the world. But Erica Jong cuts across this pleasure. As does Sophie Calle, a visual artist in her Venice project Follow me, 1988 in which Venice's openings, closures, disclosures and narratives and its construction by the tourist industry as a cultural object of desire are all resolutely ignored by Calle's narratives. [...] E. Jong is as determinate in her singular approach to Venice. This can probably give another clue to the new contemporary myth of women artists E. Jong deals with.

Leila Sand will however behave like an American artist when she pursues her career in Venice. Europe for the American artist tends to mean the proximity of culture, where one doesn't have to justify being an artist or writer with bestsellerdom or a prestigious gallery. Therefore the contrast of America/Italy is generally intensified on the level of right and wrong priorities in Any Woman's Blues. Italy has its priorities 'set right'. The pursuit of art, love and sex comes first, while in America only the pursuit of money is in the air. On the other hand exile is necessary to many artists who come from puritanical cultures. J. Joyce and H. Miller are the other examples. They both had to leave their countries to see them clearly. They both had to escape the X-ray vision of their families in order to discover and utilize their gifts. But for the American artist it also means the escape from the 'bourgeois values', from those people who assume that making a living is the same as making a life [Jong 1992, p.84]. Leila Sand had also to escape the ghost of her own obsessed self in order to reach her professional ID. Erica Jong seems quite aware of the needy conflict between America/Italy which implies the mythological dualism in her thinking - setting her notion always in contrasting pairs.

Litchfield County versus New York

Another meaningful pair for the contemporary myth of the American woman artist is within the narrative contrast between Litchfield County/Wall Street. It makes even more intricate the struggle of Leila who refers to her new sober,

crystalline period in elevated, spiritual terms. Leila, the narrator, cannot help approaching it with a great deal of irony.

From a spiritual awakening to a visit from Lionel Schaffer - how literally can you take the phrase 'from the sublime to the ridiculous'?

Lionel Schaffer belongs to the 'New Money Elite of New York' and is a noted Wall Street tycoon, but in Erica Jong's mythological reading he is always referred to as a 'voyager from another galaxy, the galaxy of Mammon', who lands with his chopper in the garden. His chopper is the profane machine that whirls, brutalizing the air above Leila's 'sweet green hillside'. The incompatibility of the two world views is so immense that it results in the cosmic clash of Earth and an UFO. As two worlds set apart, Wall Street comes to Litchfield County [p. 239/XV]. What is more striking is that when this ET enters the sacred world of Leila he cannot help but behave as a proper ET. Into the silo they go and Lionel refuses to take off his jacket and tie, perhaps 'wanting this formality, this contrast between Litchfield and Wall Street.' For a complete stranger, for a traveller from another galaxy it is certainly 'idyllic' to visit the artist in her native habitat. As if to draw a general borderline between the two worlds E. Jong calls forth the idyllic ambiance of other women artists' studios: Georgia O'Keeffe on her mesa, Romaine Brooks with Natalie Barney at Villa Gaia in Florence, Louise Nevelson in Little Italy [p. 248/XV].

In a broader frame of mind Connecticut versus New York is also very substantial binary opposition indeed. It consolidates the persistent romantic notion of the verdant country studio far enough from the crazy and ugly New York, this 'Rome-at-the-fin de siecle', again in contrast to 'Hogarth's London'. Quite haunting for the woman artist is the image of the New York garbage heap that is paradoxically perceived as 'beautiful and worth to be painted once' [p 141,2,3/VIII]. Hence New York is considered both as an exterior and interior profile and opposed to lovely, romantic Connecticut.

Beyond the topos of the attic

However there is an obvious disregard for the pseudo/Romantic notion of the attic as the only appropriate artist's space in E. Jong's interpretation of a new myth of women artists. Throughout the book Jong's emphasis on the particular working environment a woman artist needs is far from the topos of the attic as the recurrent mythologized place for the artists of the nineteenth century to live and work in. The attic is associated with the poor standard of living, illness, famine, poverty and no proper house. Even more so in mid-nineteenth century when there was a shift from the huge importance of the artist to the artists' practice and activities and his new relation to society. By then the positive Romantic approach to the artist as a creator was solidified in cliches, i.e. the myth flourished and boomed in the new trendy magazines and papers. Pseudo-romantic notions preferred the artist to be young; a genius, committed to art; with a pale forehead and burning eyes; with a dislike for

worldly vanity and a disregard for his everyday needs; being attic-bound he suffers and dies in a beautiful manner, mourned by pretty young girls [Kovalev 1985].

There is still another extremely important point which is characteristic for Leila Sand's professional self. It is important for Leila to make love in her studio, on her own easel. She used to do it in order to 'keep the creative vibes energized' - 240/XV. We have realized how vital and crucial it is for contemporary woman artist to have both love and art in reference to Leila's sexual identity. In the modern age artists seem to be quite perplexed. So does Leila. Being a creature desperately in need of her own priorities, i.e. love and art, she is definitely unhappy to realize how her priorities have 'grown too murky'; that her love is 'too mutable a thing to live for'; that her art is 'too lonely' - p.63/III. At this point love and art are perfectly sufficient to make her happy and to cast away the negative, gloomy, unsteady and uncomfortable feelings brought on by the qualitative epithets.

Beyond the cliché of the art periods in women artist's career

Perhaps it is due to art historians that art periods within an artist's career usually bear stylistic labels such as abstract, modern, post-modern, blue, pink, etc., but in Erica Jong's book such periods are hardly applicable. Leila is deliberately ironic when she puts in brackets her artistic life cut to 'so called' pieces presumably by the art critics:

I once painted a picture of lust. (That was in my so-called abstract period, which followed my so-called figurative period and preceded my so-called postmodernist film-still period.) [p.13/I]

Next to the handy but ridiculed labels of art history and criticism we have Leila's personal markers - the men in her life. Leila's need to structure her achievements into the nutshells of love/art periods could possibly reflect our need from the rites of passages, once attributed only to the archaic societies. Even in our modern times we desperately need the experience of going through different periods, different trials, failures, exploits, exams. Thus we will literally follow the adventures of Leila Sand, the heroine, as if set up in a framework of a contemporary myth [Campbell, 1995]

Although it will be in very crude terms we could try to put the periods distinct in Leila's professional identity in its different phases. Hopefully this discussion in relation to the men in her life will make much more comprehensible her split self and the various ups and downs, ins and outs she goes through.

We won't fail to notice that Dart keeps returning the pivotal point both in Leila's art and life. Even more the periods before and after Dart are always referring back and forth to him. It seems that his physical absence is also a form of mythical omniscience. Although Dart is an implicit part of the myth of stardom, newly coined by Leila Sand, the artist, there are a number of recycled myths of Pygmalion, Don Juan, etc. I try to pursue these in relation to Leila's professional identity to establish whether there is a woman artist's style inherent to her works and periods or is there only the essence of femaleness in art works.

If we are to explore Leila's career chronologically we should start with Thom.

Thom period

Even though we begin with Thom, irrevocably the emphasis will be drawn to the anticipated Dart period despite the humble pair of brackets: '(Even then I was interested in film stills - which later figured so prominently in my relationship with Dart) '[p.55/III]

The Film Stills of Dart will be soon given proper attention but what sums up Thom's period is the label of an eclectic style. In strict theoretical terms eclectic is not positive enough as a label. It is usually associated with a style drawn from various sources without following any particular system. But despite its self-critical meaning we will face a very avant-garde, up-to-date style that is powered by a new interactive media. These are number of happenings and dubious performances at which the 'bourgeois participants' were forced to strip naked and 'crawl' through canvas tubes to be photographed 'mooning at old-fashioned cameras' [p.55/III]. This is the only brief account on her works at that time which is in considerable contrast with the elaborate and extensive reviews concerning later periods and works of Leila Sand. We could even suggest that there is an implicit argument here with the perception of a Feminist style of the seventies.

The feminist beliefs of the early seventies highlighted the female body as the major art subject/object and put it forth and naked on a stage [Frueh 1994]. Leila Sand's body art performances reverse these roles slightly. Her audience of 'bourgeois participants' are made by force to trade their places with the woman artist. The narcissism of the audience is further stimulated by the old fashioned cameras clicking and memorializes their self-content gaze. The social satire that springs even from verbs like moon and crawl depicts the participants who are gazing dreamily and sentimentally at the cameras after lengths of a humiliating power play of crawling. The audience of consumers are treated as a merely redundant item in the clash between the artist and society.

Elmore period

As the novel enters Leila's period with Elmore women's art practices of the seventies are still in view. There is a radical awareness of Jong for this special moment in art history. On the crest of the interest in women's art generated by the women's movement Leila's paintings are viewed as 'erotic canvases of ordinary objects' - shells, flowers, stones, bones, made into monumental icons in a manner reminiscent of Georgia O'Keeffe's. Leila's paintings began 'to generate a great amount of interest', at a time when Elmore's Hans Hofmann-like abstractions were beginning to 'seem passe' - p.60/III. Yet what prevails in this reception again is the subtle subversive attitude of Erica Jong to the feminist preoccupations of the days. In the deliberate repetition of the phrase 'generating an interest' we could detect an evident disregard of the fashionable waves, mythologized by society in art and a sincere regard of Leila for the waves of her love-driven heart. The semi-

dramatic irony towards the most fashionable art trends is dominant in the following paragraph:

Photographed like a double madonna (i.e. mother of the twins) in my studio before a fuchsia lily's painted lips, I represented the perfect image of the artist for the vaginal age. [p.61/III]

What should not be neglected here are the social concerns about the place of women and men in the contemporary art values of the 1970s. Women are intrinsically not keen on superiority/inferiority rates in life and art but there are myriads of instances of how society tolerates the hierarchical order in the art world. The two artists' careers are positioned at a moment of intense competition. When the babies were two, Leila had her most successful show ever but this happens in the same year that Elmore fights with his dealer and left his gallery. So Leila blossomed and Elmore sulked - p.64/III. In the juxtaposition of the key verbs blossom and sulk we are given the story of this social clash in a nutshell, where blossom primarily belongs to the natural world of blooming trees, flourishing flowers as the features of success, while sulk drives us to the poor human world of grief, fret, ponder and pout as emotions of discontent. This could be conceived as a mythological binary clash of male/female; nature/man; good/bad; interest/indifference; success/failure:

Suddenly I was the token woman artist of the moment, the exception that proved the rule, the flavor of the month. Vaginal art was in, and my forms - shells or bones, flowers or stones - seemed to be what everyone required. [p.62/III]

This is what delivers the 'coup de grace of their marriage' as well as the awareness of the coup de grace of the concept of male firststratedness and superiority in art and life.

Elmore period with Leila becomes an instance of the social act of showing society's discontent with the popular mistreatment of women into arts. There is a whole paragraph of pouring pressing questions that bear the constructive rage of the woman artist. E. Jong makes the power play transparent and unbearable by the end of the paragraph. Leila Sand can hardly provide a universal answer no more than she can break loose from society's rules dictating that the man must be central, or he will sulk. She herself can no longer maintain the social illusion; she can no longer pretend, for his male ego's sake, that her work is not in the ascendancy. Hence Leila Sand is able to set up informally the rules of her self-empowering ego. Few of her questions will still linger in the air laying the foundations of the emerging myth of the triumphant woman artist.

But when one artist is a woman and the other is a man, whose work shall come first?... And what if she is the one who puts the food on the table as well as her tits into the babies mouths? [p.63/III]

Dart period

Like Elmore, Dart is also identified with the image of the failed artist. He constantly claims that 'Leila's success blocked him' (p. 27/II), which is just another manifestation

of the broken myth of the male artists dominance in the 'toplists' of art history. Whenever Dart has to cope with Leila's success he will adhere to the guilt syndrome as a manipulative enough way to sabotage Leila's work. Isn't it a clue that when a human being is turned into a myth it is always hard to live up to his/her unfathomable demands and high profile? Are these hundreds of role models available for us only to aspire to them but never to reach and transcend them? Could this be an answer for the ceaseless myth-reinterpreting and mythmaking in human arts and culture? Whatever answer Yes or No we arrive back at our immediate concern - Dart and how he has never risen to his own aspirations to create art himself. Though he once told Leila he 'had fashioned western sculptures a la Remington (when he wasn't fashioning female bodies with his extra rib'] [p.15/I]. This, of course, is told at the outset of their love affair yet the bracketed afterthought is only too suggestive of Dart's major style. The metaphoric use of the verb 'fashion' and the jocular implications of a biblical replica of the 'extra rib' could prompt on Dart's quite promising skills in his art of being the model, the live-in muse, rather than the artist. Later Leila is to realize with a shock that she never: actually saw him paint or sculpt'; that somehow he never got together his projected one-man show, though he was always promising to; that he never even began the work for his show; nor would he run the Grand Teton Gallery - called in honour of their liaison [p.26/7/II].

What he did consistently was always to follow his 'rotten luck' in all of his activities.

Perhaps later on we could ascertain the reversal of the good old romantic myth of the old master and his lady muse, that will culminate in the specific re-reading of Erica Jong of the Pygmalion story a bit. In his own sense of inadequacy, Dart is always the model, never the artist.

I think of Dart: he is his own finest creation. If he cannot paint or sculpt, it is because all his artistic ability has gone into the creation of his own persona, a not inconsiderable feat. He is always inventing himself. How can he invent mere paintings? An artist must be a funnel from the muse to the matter. Dart is both muse himself and self-creation. [p. 79/IV]

It is worth now to take a glimpse ahead in time when Dart will no longer be the muse powering Leila's art. Being dethroned as a muse Dart gets into excesses and destroys Leila's new work of a still life that has been inspired by no muse, by no model, by no Dart. Leila is seized with panic - somehow that if he sees the crystalline still-life, created in his absence, he will destroy it. So clear will it be to him that he has been replaced as a muse - p.113/VI. Rather than destroying the new piece that bears no trace of his omnipresence Dart stings Leila with guilt when feeling entirely powerless at the chaos of their broken connections, at his own image of a failed lover and a failed artist:

[Dart:] I think you are the greatest painter since Michaelangelo, but I still remember the time when you slept all night in my arms and nothing could tear you away. [p.113/VI]

But the still-life could and did tear her away as if to reiterate that the relationship artist/muse is apparently very significant for the professional identity of Leila Sand. Erica Jong is always aware of telling Leila's story from her point of the woman artist. Leila is the one who says: 'I had given him every young artist's dream - a barn to work in, unlimited time, all his expenses paid (p. 22/I). Would it make a difference if it were told from someone else's point of view? How would it affect Leila's profile? Here are some speculations on the outcome if Dart were to write his part of the story. What would he say? Leila would be no longer the good girl but the one who 'emasculated' him and made him feel weak. That big bad Leila who took all his marbles away.

This is how Leila's mythical strength and huge fame proves hazardous like casting loads of bad spell and bad magic on her muse. 'That big, bad Leila' is notoriously difficult to comprehend. 'That big, bad Leila' is how a woman artist would be called when she is rebelling against the set taboos of her time. No wonder 'that big, bad Leila' felt the same when once in school had been the model for a friend of hers - a figurative painter named Mihailovich, 'who painted me for a month (out of love, I believe) but who made me look a way that was not at all to my liking.' She remembers too the feeling of being out of control. This is where one can draw a parallel between Leila and Dart. It strikes her that Dart is trying to control her in his own ways: by bringing the 'bimbo' to Leila's New York loft, by darting, by fucking her in my bed [p.153/IX]. The reason is to be found in the powerful word 'control'. Dart feels being out of control and out of the traditional context of male superiority all the time. Perhaps he feels more like Galatea in Erica Jong's story.

The Pygmalion myth recycled

In questioning the stereotypes of creativity Erica Jong tends to decontextualize and reverse the patterns. The mythological Greek couple of Pygmalion and Galatea enjoys a shift of their roles in the story of Leila/Dart. Alongside with this major reversal Erica Jong questions and alters the places even of the archaic couple Moon/Sun. In her cover version we have Dart as a moon and Leila as a sun for Dart, 'who required a sun in order to gleam'(p.26).

The Pygmalion myth has been told and retold many times-but never with the woman as artist and the man as Galatea! A quick cross-reference from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Marston's *Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598), Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*, W.S. Gilbert's comedy *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871) up to G.B. Shaw *Pygmalion* (1912) [BBM&L 1993] will prove that Galatea is always an Aphrodite's sister. But what happens to Pygmalion myth when our creator is a woman and her creation is a man? Simple: the creation betrays the creator with as many 'nubile young groupies as possible' [p.67/III.] Dart/Galatea couldn't possibly help betraying his Leila/Pygmalion. Having become a star through Leila's loving re-creations of him, he was now 'besieged by young cuties.'

Leila was left no other chance but to blame her cowboy canvases of Dart that went to live on their own life, regardless of her artist's will: to keep her creation as near as possible.

The sexuality I found in him exuded from the C prints, from those cowboy canvases, and every spectator could feel it. Dart had become the property of the world, and everyone wanted to fuck him. [p.67/8]

Instead of marrying her creation as a proper Pygmalion does Leila is caught in her own trap of being a fierce artist, rather than a fierce lover. It is quite amusing in the same reversed mode that this is Dart who insists on marrying Leila while she is not at all that eager. The odd episode of his proposal when he produces a diamond ring for her results in her getting 'engaged to herself' - 'Leila is engaged to Louise Zandberg'. This is just a tiny example of the powerful identity of Leila as of an artist who gradually turns towards self-love and self-respect, rather than sticking to the mythical woman's lot of a victim.

Dart in the cowboy canvases and the film stills

What remains undeniable is that Dart Donegal had given her a lot - the gift of life, and so Leila returned the favor by immortalizing her lover in her art. There are two very exciting 'memorabilia' of Dart that could cover Dart period in Leila's career. These are the cowboy canvases and the series, called simply 'The Film Stills of Dart/Trick Donegal' that was even more successful than the cowboy canvases and made Dart, by Leila's own hand, a star and a myth. Both of them are given prominence in terms of their creative process and appreciation.

We could argue that the artist's choice to reside in the figurative style, portraying her darting lover is a symptomatic enough for her addiction to both love and art. It is her only period so explicitly organized around this obsessive topic of Dart. From that point on we will have works and periods mirroring Leila's mind but none of them will dwell on creating portraits of Dart/love.

The creative period of the cowboy canvases could be very useful with a hint on what is not like Leila's style. A rather 'sappy' rendition of Dart and Leila's first meeting in the Tetons: 'cowboy and a cowgirl riding beneath the sunset through fields of flowers - an image more suitable to one of those pseudo-hippie greeting cards than for a show of the new works of Leila Sand.' Leila had painted it to Dart's design ('he had scribbled a rough sketch on a napkin; I, of course, had painted it as if bewitched) and there is no denying that it's an abortion' (p.26/1). The succulent and energetic connotation of 'sappiness' is coupled with the pseudo-romantic message to consolidate our vision of anti-Leila. What will keep concerning us though will be what is Leila-like style, what a woman artist's style is like? Are there are any particular patterns that are valid in any woman's art/blues? How about the particularities of a male style? These are the traps for any art historian, no matter how for or against gender studies they are.

What is assuredly valid for Leila Sand's art is the tricky elusive line between art and love. Both the film stills and the cowboy canvases were 'born of my love for

Dart'. From the moment Leila met Dart, she 'was sketching him'. From the sketches of him, she evolved the cowboy series -'enormous mixed-media close-ups of Dart as the Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers, Gary Cooper in High Noon'. Leila is aware that she is rearranging myths and mythical figures, which proves very dear and appealing to the bying audience. This very bying audience proves not only that the paintings are 'alive' but that the myths of the fifties are still tantalizing to the world in the eighties. Myths are persistently alive and what sustains them is the power of art.

I took this cultural icons of my childhood and superimposed this beautiful young man upon them. I hybridized this man born in the fifties with these images from my fifties childhood, and the passion with which I did this lost on no one. [p.66/III]

The passionate film stills of Dart are portraits of Dart that depict his 'infinitely inspiring, infinitely bewitching, infinitely alluring' multiple ego. No wonder that this overstressed infiniteness ends up in the photographs, that are 'blown up to the overlifesize C prints, like movie posters.' As if these efforts are not mythologizing enough Leila invokes in them the metaphors for his multiple personalities. Providing herself with an old-fashioned camera Leila begins photographing Dart in various costumes: 'Alecchino in motley, the Lone Ranger (again), rock star as heartthrob (with Elvis Presley thrust at the camera), fifties truckdriver in T-shirt with beer can in hand, young WASP in black tie, St. Sebastian pierced with arrows, Hell's Angel in black leather, Jesus in a loincloth on the cross' [p.67/III].

This is whereabout Erica Jong takes her chance to dismantle another 'minor' misconception - that of photography as a lesser art. By applying one and the same verb when referring to Dart and photography 'I had always been fascinated by...' Jong ranks photography equal among the most traditional, somewhat patriarchal modes of expression and types of media as a manipulation of light upon the retina, containing every bit as much of its own integrity as oil painting or the carving of marble [p.67/III].

How far can the Don Juan myth go?

Besides the remarkably longish list of Dart's personality what seems most like his proper mythical counterpart is Don Juan. There is one recurrent line that comes back to Leila from a poem she read in college: 'Wax to receive and marble to retain'. Don Juan's heart. Byron's Don Juan. Dart's heart. "Wax to receive and marble to retain' I don't want to fall in love with Don Juan again'. [p.177/X]

Don Juan's image is an ever haunting one all throughout the book thereafter. With Dart gone, Leila even imagined a piece based on this insight, using the materials of marble - faux marble - and real wax. This is a work in progress that would be called Don Juan, that would deal with all the many possibilities of this theme - 'The marble heart. The wax heart. The heartless heart' [p.177/X].

As a further extension of the love/art pair Leila will involve still another of her darting lovers - Renzo in the Don Juan myth. However Leila tends to identify herself

with both of them. Dart's good intentions in his words 'I'll be your mirror' appear to be very prophetic. So that Leila's post-Dartian work Don Juan could be decoded in the old favorite way of reversing Don Juan with Donna Giovana in a new myth. Leila considers herself a Donna Giovana, while Dart is her 'karmic revenge' - the revenge of her own philandering. In rendering their split-up in this way Dart becomes the visible manifestation of Leila's own addiction to love, to her falling in love with love, to her breaking (or at least collecting) hearts. In underlying the fact that Dart is 'the god's revenge' for Leila E. Jong is probably aware how persistent is the patriarchal tradition which dictates for women artist never to take the control of their lives. Otherwise, for gaining control, women must pay a very dear price.

This is actually how the novel's real time opens - with Dart as the visible display of Leila's obsession with him, with Leila's self-confidence at its lowest. The artist is alone in her studio-silo, trying to get together some paintings for a new show. But her concentration is 'utterly blasted' and she is 'utterly wretched'. The exaggeration corresponds to the troublesome and painful process of self-discovery. Leila is in, but her muse has flown, Dart has gone. She is struggling to discover the muse within herself to be able to work, but in reality all she does is listen for 'the sound of Dart's motorcycle on the gravel pathway and for the sound of the telephone announcing his arrival...' [p.69/III].

Meanwhile in anticipation of Dart's arrival we are invited on a art tour with Dart and Leila. They both shared a love for art by going for a year to all the art world key venues. They toured the world. They went from *Documenta* to the Basel Art Fair, from Whitney to Palazzo Garssi, from Dusseldorf to Munich, from Venice to Vienna. And then even without a beat Erica Jong goes from serious art observation to her lovers' bed: 'Who cared where we were, as long as we were in bed.' [p.16/I]

It is quite interesting that the last visible apparition of Dart in the novel, almost closing the story in the chapter before the last, is envisaged through the phone image. This is a very significant image for Dart's entry and presence both in the novel and in Leila's heart and art. The telephone motif thus will be exclusively reviewed in regard with woman artist's social identity. What is relevant for us now is the episode just before the Viva Venezia Ball, at the Venetian hotel when Leila is deep asleep. There is a telephone call from New York for Leila in the middle of the night as if 'from the dead'. It is Dart, who is wide awake and walking down the Madison Avenue, seeing nothing but the Lone Ranger in a gallery window. These are the same magic film stills, in which he was dressed as the Lone Ranger, 'and his gun was tucked into his pants rakishly and seemed to bulge like a cock', that turned him and his gun into a myth: [Dart:] Remember the Lone Ranger, baby? How can I ever forget?... Because of you everyone knows about my big gun... Darling - the whole world knew before. [325,6/XIX].

Leila's 'Dart Gone' style

With Dart gone we enter the period where the dominant style of the woman artist, of Leila Sand seems to be rather conceptual and always on the level of the project which never comes into being. We could briefly mention some brilliant ideas for Leila's works that are left to linger in the world of ideas, just before taking the venture of exploring the three paramount series in Leila's career: her Pandora's box collages; Albino still-lives and the Nymph and Satyr series.

By becoming an expert on porn videos, Leila begins to think of doing a porn video piece as a tribute to her love affair with Danny Doland. With her mind focused on the irony and lightheartedness Erica Jong once again mixes art and sex. The moment Leila 'wasn't about to give up' her sex and art, Danny 'seemed he was'. [210/XII]

At some point Leila is considering to do a conceptual piece on the AA scroll, but she gives up 'for fear of tampering with the magic' (p.159/IX). Perhaps for fear of flying she gives up the idea of a collage of all the objects and photos of Dart's girlfriend found in her New York loft. She contemplates of entitling it 'Dart's Bimbo' but the pain seems too great, so she lets 'anger triumph over art' and tossed them all out of the window. With the pain still inside her, Leila goes as far as thinking of a suicidal art not without a tinge of black black humour, calling it 'Dart Gone'. This work is further related to the water imagery which stands for Leila's aspirations to creativity. Dart is gone and so is Leila's fear of diving and flying back to her creative self. Here is Leila, who for her art's sake, could open her veins in the bathtub. Here is Leila who could draw a water painting with her blood - 'all that red blood marbleizing the clear water'. Here is Leila who could do film-still self-portrait as her 'life ebbs away' ...who could puncture her veins and smear the fresh blood all over a canvas... - p.90/V. Despite the degrading attention of E. Jong to the suicidal work of Leila who defines it as a small 'talk about postmodernist images' we are well-convinced that the woman artist draws her works from her immediate experience, from her harsh life.

What could drive Leila that far is probably the awareness of another mythologised concept that rules her life: the motif that art is life and life is art. After the overwhelmingly shocking and sullyng experience at the Psychodrama Institute of Madame Ada Leila is figuring an S & M piece. Collages of black leather and whips, S & M film stills, sculptures of boots and shoes, shackles and chains, obsess her for a while. But she gives them up as 'hocke' and decides to do nothing and later converts to writing. (p. 279/XVIII, 'Bye-bye Blues'). Although at the bottom of her despair, alone, as she has ever been, she tries again to work on various collages on the single haunting theme of Dart. Yet the very symbolic act of creating a collage seems to match perfectly Leila's troubled state of mind. She no longer knows whether she is painting or living, whether she is 'killing Dart or killing herself'. She is not simply making a collage on the theme of Dart, but a collage 'out of the bits and pieces of her life'. Unsurprisingly the metaphor of collage may imply woman artist's life. Once Leila is in the collage, she cannot get out. [254/XVI].

Pandora's Box collage

This is how we get to the Leila's version of the old Greek myth of the beautiful all-gifted Pandora, opening her jar/vase/box of evils. 'All the evils flew forth and they have ever since continued to afflict the world' or so the Pandora's myth flows [BBM&L 1993]. Here we face Leila, who likewise Pandora, is opening her box - a box of Dart memorabilia, which she has hidden away from herself. Out she takes all the photographs, cards, dried flowers, and begins to assemble them into a collage.

As the fury to turn the love affair into its own monument takes me, as the fever rises, I seize hold of the scissors and paste and start snipping, pasting, even daubing over the bits and pieces of my life with Dart. Pandora's Box, I call it, as the fury to collage my life overwhelms me. [p.252/XVI]

While arranging snipped pieces of Dart, Leila is battling with herself over the same old dilemma of art and life, trying to find the answer of the question what does it mean to be an artist who takes all the pieces of her life - quite literally - as material? 'Does it doom one to unhappiness, or is it after all the only bliss?' (p.253/XVI) Without any answer Leila Sand carries on, cherishing her belief of the blurring boundaries between life and art. The Pandora's Box seems to grow alive and animated like the famous canvas of Dorian Gray in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. So does Dart, who seems to be winking at Leila, saying 'Call me, Call me' [p.255/XVI].

However the Pandora's Box is a source for another myth that will contribute for the perception of Leila's style. Pandora's box is able to invoke another mythological personae - that of the terrible mother goddess of Kali. The Indian goddess that stands for the creative principle and the destructive principle joined in one. While snipping, pasting and rearranging bits of her life, Leila feels not only like Pandora, but like Kali, as well. Leila is represented as a double of Kali. The madness is the same madness, as well as the fever in the blood and the pride of 'creating a word out of nothingness'. We could be assured that whenever E. Jong deals with fever, fury and madness she brings about their positive connotations in reference to the creative woman. No wonder that when Leila looks at the snippets and pieces she has been playing with all day her 'head throbs...' with positive feelings. Kali's view to creativity seems to hold the answer to the contemporary woman artist: 'How else dare to create, if you do not dare to destroy?' [p.256/XVI].

There is still another collage piece, that is born by the same creative force to destroy. It is based on all of Leila's obsolete Filofax pages and Rolodex cards, reminding us irrevocably of her mythical obsession with the telephone. It is firstly called 'Sex in the Age of AIDS', with some pieces cut into sensual, even genital shapes, with dismembered Polaroids of Dart, and even with a pink-wrapped Excita condom pasted in the center. Leila is once again presented like a woman possessed with passion, energy and lust. Jong summons up all those positive emotions into the paper and the glue and arrives at the most appropriate and exuberant sexual simile, where the images 'vibrate like an orgasm well and truly achieved' [p.257/XVI]. This collage could also be called 'Empty Bed Blues' and further dedicated to Bessie Smith, Leila's heroine, as if to lead us to her new period:

The Maenads and Crystal Period

Out in her silo, Leila sets up her still life, choosing the elements carefully. Off we follow the most intricate and the most written about period in Leila's art that is appropriately identified with a new period, a new way of mirroring her life, the coming back of her sane mind. No wonder that Leila's sane mind is often metonymically replaced by her maenads and crystals. What is even more intriguing is that the insight and the actual work process is carried out in the early beginning of the novel, the VIth chapter, called Experience, Strength, Hope. As early as that Leila could go on in search of her selfhood with all her heart open to serenity.

On the other hand we could ascertain the flux of at least two important mythological issues with entering the crystalline period. One is the contemporary notion of the mad woman artist enriched by the parallel with the maenads; the other is the black vision of the artists' world run over by the sudden parallel with the enlightening white world of the maenads and crystal. Both of them are discussed at length in reference to the woman artist's social identity. Is the choice of the still-life elements arbitrary? On the contrary it proves very careful and suggestive on the side of women artists and the narrator.

...a dozen white jumbo eggs in Lalique crystal bowl with maenads dancing around its borders, a clearcrystal egg, a white china milk pitcher in the shape of a cow, a cylindrical clear-glass vase filled with white roses and calla lilies, and under it all an antique white lace tablecloth, which I gather into folds so that it looks like snowy Alps. [p.110/VI]

In search of every shade of white, Leila begins losing herself in the challenge of 'finding the kaleidoscope of colors within the word white'. There is a real outburst of happiness that clusters the whole kaleidoscope of words, suggesting happy ecstasy: 'wholly happy, wholly content I am happy-happier than I have been in years; I paint as if in a trance; In a trance, I paint and paint; My head clear, my heart singing in my chest, I am in ecstasy; In a rage of excitement I paint; I paint and paint - rapt, happy; I am still painting like this - my mind galloping, my heart full...(p.113,4/VI).

Being the happiest woman artist ever Leila is likened to the maenads 'dancing as they have danced for centuries', to those frenzied women, attendants of Bacchus in his hedonistic orgies and wild, wild rites [BBM 1993]. Leila Sand is entirely absorbed in the drama of those dancing creations of her mind, painting this still life not in real light but in the light of the mind. All is light and clarity, something 'pure, clear, complex, and glittering as snow' that her work has never possessed before. This is her 'glimmering testament to a new life':

The valleys of the tablecloth glimmer as if with alpine snow; the eggs show little calcified bumps, like ovaries about to burst their follicles; the crystal egg seems to hold the future in its depths; the roses and lilies open before my eyes... [113/VI]

The albino study grows much more fantastical and abstract with the coming

days and so does E. Jong's imagery which is appropriating cosmic elements to set Leila's new period within the proper vast scale, being another manifestation of the flying metaphor in E. Jong's oeuvre. The moon is setting behind the dancing maenads and the eggs are transformed into the whirling planets and the cow is spraying milk through the starry universe. It seems that Leila Sand can't help imagining a whole series of large canvases based on that crystalline theme, with each of the objects - moon, maenads, eggs, cow, milk - becoming an emblem of a new life for women, for children, for the planet. She will call it 'Albino Lives I,II,II' and so onto infinity. What really happens is not a product of the artist's intentions and projects only. The dancing maenads and the clarity of her new vision is further on once again celebrated through the authority of Leila's old teacher from Russia - a figurative painter who argues that the artist is a seer and a prophet. The legacy left for Leila is that the artist needs to learn not how to paint but how to see, because if an artist can see, the painting comes by itself [p.299/XVII].

Yet most of the so-called artists in the book are blind. Perhaps that is why Jong's emphasis on the capacity to see is so closely linked with the flying metaphor and the magic image of the air. The whole point of painting is to capture the air, the light shimmering in the air between the artist and her/his pursuit, because only then the seeing artist is painting the 'dance of the molecules, the dance of the molecules that made up what we call 'real'. This concentration on the dance irrevocably rings the bell of the dancing maenads as another key image in Leila's career.

Not surprisingly 'The Albino Lives' are threatened with destruction by Dart for their provocative clarity. It once again indicates that creating and art making is not an easy job. You need to pay the price of being disturbed and ridden by guilt. Dart's last visit to Leila's sacred place - her studio-silo, ends up with the poeticism of a non-pathetic tear:

Then wordlessly, we get up, separate, and Dart goes down the silo stairs again. I pick up my brush and paint a highlight on one of the maenads's cheek. A tear. But only one. And Dart is gone. [290/XI]

The Nymph and Satyr Series

After the incident with Dart, Renzo arrives and this is where the 'Nymph and Satyr' Series begins. For 'alone and elated', Leila goes to Venice to look at the Old Masters drawings. Here is another chance for Erica Jong, the narrator, to get in and elaborate on the misconception of the primacy of the painting, as opposed to drawing, praised in the conventional art history books. For the woman artist drawings have an immediacy that paintings lack. What is worth seeing in the drawings from her modern point of view is the process, the artist's mind at work, the line itself, the play of the mind. (p.346/XX) Eventually Leila is to enclose a drawing of hers to end the story.

Firstly we will follow Leila's trip around the museum. She dwells for a while on the unanswerable questions of male and female struggle for power: 'Love or murder?

Mayhem or merging?' before a Domenico Campagnola drawing of a struggling couple which seemed 'forever and forever arrested in the moment before male blade pierces female flesh'. Then Leila prefers to ignore the centuries of man's obsession with depicting the eternal Christian myths of 'sketchy Virgins with sketchy Children, the warm-ups for ceiling goddesses, the Abrahams sacrificing Isaacs, the old men, the knights, the Bacchuses'. And finally Leila is free and ready to head towards her new maenads and crystal period - the 'Nymph and Satyr' Series, to draw her way back to sanity. Her impetus for a new life seems as ancient as the Giovanni Batista Tiepolo's version from mid-18C. This is odd enough but here comes the only complete description of a work of an artist other than Leila's:

I come to a Veronese nymph pursued through leafy woodland (with baby dragons underfoot) by a determined satyr (who looks, of course, exactly like my Renzo). And here, limpid and relaxed after love, are a faun and fauness drawn by Tiepolo. He kisses the top of her human brow; she closes slanted eyes in ecstasy. Her hooves are as hairy as his, but she has human breasts and a human heart, and he is melted, for a moment by the Land of Fuck. The artist has raised her right hand, then scribbled it out, as if not knowing whether or not to give her that power.
[p.347/XX]

Leila is certainly so excited as to take out her little notebook with the marbled paper cover and to draw 'quickly' her own version of the Tiepolo scene. Her fauness lingers as languidly as his, but the hand she raises wields a drawing pen. 'As she dreams against her faun's rough hairy shoulder, she translates this fleeting scene of lust, of love, for future eyes to see.' Back home from the mythically inspiring Venice Leila plans to do a nymph-and-satyr series. She is absolutely determined to do it once she holds the answer, i.e. the drawing pen in her hand. Neither the Trobriands with Julian, nor Venice with Renzo provides the answer. Here comes the drawing of Leila Sand that closes the story convincingly since it is supposed to be drawn by Leila/Tiepolo.

Once again the readers can enjoy the dance of the maenads, the dance of the sex-pursuit, the retreat-of nymph and satyr, faun and fauness, that has been going on for thousands upon thousands of years. The dancing Leila is celebrating her new self, her ever creative personality and the evidence of her ever 'limning' identity of a woman artist:

And I am hardly the first to want to capture it on paper. As long as flesh exists, someone will rise from the warmth of the huddle in the cave and struggle to her - or his knees - to scribble pictures - or words - on the wall of the cave, to please - or irk - the gods and goddesses. We go on revealing our hearts in the hope that they never stop beating. Vain hope. As long as I live, I know I will hold the pen that limns this satyr, this nymph, this dark, bedragoned wood. [p.348/XX]

This is the celebration of Leila Sand, of women artists professional identity, that goes through the hardships of her current everyday life and the eternity tests as if only to reach this happy-ending of her story.

More on the women artists

To round off this discussion about professional identities, there are few remarkable instances of Erica Jong elaborating on real historical women artist's identities, which can further support our thesis on Leila Sand. By bringing up this subject the narrator, however, sticks to her basic concerns of the pressing issues of the contemporary woman artist. Perhaps that is also the reason for deviating for a while from her protagonist and inventing two more sidestory characters of women artists - Cordelia Herald and Rivka Landesmann.

Erica Jong's reclaiming of women artists

It is quite intriguing that it is Dart's father, Mr. Donegal- the paragon of the patriarchal WASP establishment - who is the first in the book to open this highly neglected by the society subject of women artists, something in which he claims 'to be knowledgeable'. He asks what Leila thought of Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun, Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, Rosa Bonheur , all the icons and would-be myths of women old masters, newly 'discovered' by feminist art history at that. Leila's identification with and respect for them could be summed up in her great admiration - p.41/II. Unsurprisingly Mr. Donegal keeps asking whether women artists of the 1980s were still discriminated against. One could assume that Leila's view on contemporary lady artists is realistic enough when she answers that the discrimination 'was still there but had taken new forms'. These are those new forms of the old myth of women artists we are actually concerned with in this paper. The old myth needs to be revisited now and then as if it can bring good luck, protection and bits of wisdom for any woman artist. Isn't that what myths are for?... And Leila Sand doesn't miss to make use of them, calling up the ghosts of female artists of the past to protect her 'like ranks of guardian angels, painted in wet lime on some Venetian ceiling'. Here are but a few of the ghosts: Marietta Robusti, 'La Tintoretta', Lavina Fontana, Rosalba Carriera, Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun, Adelaide Labille-Guiard, Angelika Kaufmann, Anna Peale, Rosa Bonheur, Berthe Morisor, Mary Cassat, Kathe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Vanessa Bell, Georgia O'Keeffe. [All mentioned in the very special essay by Linda Nochlin]. These are the ghosts of the real teachers of Leila:

All the technique, the love, the infinite capacity for taking pains, the courage, the guts, the heart of these women who drew and painted against all odds, comes into my fingers. Oh, the longing to make the difficult look easy! I want to be like one of those old fresco painters who had such talent, such craft, such knowledge of chemistry, even, that they could put down the colour before the lime had time to dry, leaving the illusion of spezzatura - that wonderful Italian ideal of making the difficult look easy - for all eternity, or at least five hundred years. [p.185/XI]

What Leila dreams to be like is one of those infinitely courageous women painters. No wonder her dream invokes so many attributes of power and courage in the paragraph above. Leila dreams to live up to her own role models despite the social

conventions which are still setting up difficulties on any woman artist's road. Isn't that a clear sign that one can follow one's own myths with the only risk that one might be ostracized and outcast by the community? Despite all her unusually wide recognition Leila Sand keeps feeling as an outcast. It is even evident in her craving to be like the mythical rebel - Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun. Out of the 'wide' range of women artists Leila picks up only her - the one who lived by her brush and survived in very troubled times. Elisabeth's personal story is far more than an example to Leila. There is a brief account of that mythical/inspiring story which Erica Jong accommodates in the anxieties of her Leila Sand.

Leila as the mythical rebel Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun

As a court painter to Marie Antoinette, Elisabeth became penniless because her husband spent all the money and she had to make her fortune anew, painting landscapes, touring around the European courts. In England, where Sir Joshua Reynolds still ruled the taste of the time, he 'condescended to praise her even though she was a woman'. She returned to Paris, to paint Napoleon's court, published her *Souvenirs*, and died at 87. 'What a life! If Vigee-Lebrun could do it during the French Revolution, why am I rushing headlong into the arms of Danny Doland?' [206,7/XII]

The exclamation conveys both Leila's admiration and her eagerness to be like Elisabeth. Leila does not belong to the world of the proper millionaires like Danny's, nor could she be part of their collections. But there is probably another implication of her life-parallel with Elisabeth. The troubled times of the French Revolution are as much troubled as the times of the Women's movement from the late 1960s up until now for women artists in particular. The verb 'condescend' is still ruling the popular attitude towards those rare birds, creative women. If you are a woman and if you dare to aspire to the land reserved for the creative man you might be sure that you will still be treated in the vein of Sir Joshua Reynolds: 'Even though you are a woman'. What turns quite convincing is that Elisabeth's story is also told in the 'you' point of view, which cuts short the temporal distance and extends a promising invitation for the reader's identification with Elisabeth/Leila. Erica Jong goes as far as to suggest that Elisabeth's husband who ruined his wife and then 'trimmed his sails to the prevailing wind' might as well be 'your husband', might as well be Danny Doland, himself. Thus Elisabeth's blues are no longer confined to her historical moment but to any woman's blues.

Leila Sand and her contemporaries

Erica Jong builds up the professional 'I' of her protagonist by running still another parallel with two women artists who are Leila's contemporaries. Both of them are given just a narrative corner as sidestory characters but their role is not at all insignificant. Cordelia Herald is an old art school classmate of Leila. Cordelia has moved to live in Venice and paints in a crumbling Gothic palazzo on the Grand Canal.

Although Leila never used to understand why Cordelia sticks to Venice when Venice seems 'so self-consciously out-of-this-world' the enchantment of Venice is once again celebrated by the introduction of Cordelia's story [p.295/XVIII].

Indeed a visit to Cordelia's house, with her paintings, hung everywhere or propped against the walls, confronts Leila with a woman who is entirely happy with her detachment from the worldly world, who feels like a local character and cannot imagine a better life for a painter-or anyone. This self-confidence of Cordelia in a way incites Leila's pursuit of her self-love. Moreover the novel finishes with the end of Leila's stay in Venice. Could Leila Sand probably have got some of the message from Cordelia? Nevertheless there is an air of criticism or perhaps commonplace envy that prevails in Leila's perceptions of Cordelia's works: 'monumental equine forms (sort of mad Rosa Bonheur gone abstract).' The key epithet of 'mad' implies the popular social misunderstanding of the productive, creative infatuation of artists on the one hand and on the other it invokes the moment when birds of a feather flock together. The latter is gaining an upper hand with the increasing awareness of Leila that she is spiritually akin to Cordelia. This same air of competitive vigour and feeling of sisterhood is to be disclosed in the relationship between Leila Sand and Rivka Landesmann. Rivka is a classmate of Leila's from high school. Erica Jong applies the flattering words 'a talented painter' to Rivka which is far from 'the prodigious talent' of Leila but the gap is there. Rivka is a someone who had a gallery before Leila did, someone Leila was once 'envious of' because '...she seemed to have it made, when I was still struggling for my first recognition as a painter.' [p.157/IX]

The competitiveness, once attributed only to the male world, seems to be a rule rather than an exception in Leila's strategy. Is it because once you are in you have to follow the set rules of the game? And whom are the rules set by? Men! Leila proves utterly confused by her own statements - she is the one who wouldn't object in using her sex appeal to allure critics if it could boost her work but she grows envious and cynical when someone else used it. If that is Rivka, she will be called a 'prodigy', because she used to hang around with Andy Warhol, did movies with him, sold her work to important collectors, was written up everywhere - then ... 'vanished'. Leila hadn't heard from Rivka for years until she runs into her at an AA night Meeting in New York. At this very meeting Leila gains part of her sane mind as she tries to understand Rivka. This is almost as symptomatic as her visit to Cordelia's, as if under the bad spell of New York, usually associated with garbage, death, and apocalypse, both women meet both of them drunk in the middle of the night. This is when Leila grows aware not only of Rivka's post-success story but of her own potential for getting worse and worse. Leila meets another Rivka who has hit bottom, lost everything - her husband, her daughter, her hormones, but gained eighty pounds and self-pity. This new failed Rivka is so suicidal and manipulative as to accuse Leila of being more fortunate, of always being in the right place at the right time, and on the crest of the wave at the moment - p.157/IX. Leila immediately projects herself in

this woman, seeing an example of a woman 'squandering her life by playing the victim'. At this point ironically enough, although Leila is drunk she gets 'enlightened' and tries to convince Rivka or herself in a proper preacher's speech about the gift of life and the right of the choice to affirm or deny it.

We really can choose to live or to die - but we can't straddle the fence. And if we want to live we have no choice but to submit - not to our own will, to God's, to Her. Or Him. It doesn't even matter; it's a sort of vanity to argue about the sex of God. We are talking about spirit here, the gift of life. [p. 157/IX]

As if to claim her and Rivka's lives back from the dead, from Hades, Leila hugs Rivka, though she 'couldn't even get her arms around her but she hugged her'. The symbolic background for this scene couldn't have been more appropriate - New York by night and a dying homeless bum in whose decaying flesh, Leila pretends to see her beautiful Dart. Leila is deadsure she needs to pull herself together, to get tough with herself. She is then free of her fear of competing. She feels free to realize that all her success has led her to pressures of a different sort from the ones Rivka has had, that there is no room for competition between them - p.157/IX.

Some old male masters involved in Leila's story

Erica Jong does mention the names of the old male masters for the reader to realize once again how important is the reverse Pygmalion myth. Out of her adoration Leila painted this beautiful man (or photographed him) and made him famous as her muse. Thus she did what Rembrandt did for Saskia, what Wyeth did for Helga, what da Vinci did for Mona Lisa [p.65/II].

Rather ironically Jong evokes the name of the 'big brown standard poodle Boner'. We are led to believe that this ordinary dog is the very embodiment of both Leila's and Elmore's aspirations. It is 'named for both Michelangelo Buanarroti and Rosa Bonheur'(p.64 /II). The ordinary dog is likened to the male genius of Buanarroti and the female artist of the past - Bonheur, newly recovered name of the neglected. This reflects the beloved ironic approach of Jong to the impact of feminism on the understanding of art history. This is just a tiny example of the diverse, non-straightforward and cheerful approach of Jong who is often misinterpreted as a writer who takes too seriously her heroine. [Lodge 1989, Stanley 1990] With the bitter observation of a satirist Erica Jong applies another simile with a name of an old master at its core - that of Hogarth, in an idyllic scene of family reunion. 'In the sitting room, I met with a Hogarthian tableau of the Donegal family chatting around the fire as if nothing at all were the matter' [p.46/II].

This is a family that embodies the mythologized WASPdom for Leila. The WASP grounds are further subverted by the deliberate use of the technique of drawing in one's mind, in Leila's mind of an artist. This drawing even turns to be a 'tableau', which carries the snobbishness and the whimsical nature of the hypocritical family.

The blur of art and life

Quite central to Leila's creative world is the fuzzy boundary between life and art, which can ultimately persuade the reader that the personal is professional and vice-versa. This is also a sort of arguing with the early feminist slogan: The political is personal. In Leila's life of the mind it is no longer so important to come to terms with the outer world but with one's own self.

As usual I don't know whether I'm painting or living. I have that crazed, semi-hysterical feeling that overtakes me when I've been working like a maniac and what passes as real life interrupts. [261/XVII]

Being an artist is sometimes a 'curse', because whatever the artist does or experience in reality is likely to be eternalized into art. This is a high price to be paid but it is also the sweet curse to be ever creating. This is the drive that keeps Leila in her urge to 'memorialize' Dart in the cowboy series and film stills works. This is the drive that rules Leila's art/life long after Dart is gone. For a woman artist in particular it seems impossible just to sulk without having this state of mind reflected, it seems that you can't sink into depravity without thinking of how to turn sinking into depravity into art [p.275/XVII].

Leila Sand craves for the extreme desire to make her life into a work of art, which could be revealed as a 'trap for every woman artist'. Leila is dramatically aware that she'd rather serve the feast, than paint it [243/XV]. At this point she refers particularly to the garden feast at her property set to salute the visit of Lionel but in more general terms to the well-established popular position of women of servants, rather than creators. This position however proves even more difficult for a contemporary woman who subconsciously fears to fly beyond it, who advocates this position even more fiercely than any men. Leila's lifelong concern with life in her art could be felt in the persistent metaphor that life/art are a feast. Thus Leila's drawings and paintings are able to communicate 'joy to the joyless, faith to the unbeliever, and love to the loveless'. Unsurprisingly her words and paintings sound like life, sound like a prayer for life. She wants everyone to savour and celebrate life because it is a feast. Here is her prayer: Life is there for the taking. You have to open your mouth, open your hand, love one another, thank God and rejoice.

Conclusions

Erica Jong's woman artist is caught in a transitional period of American culture when the myth of the eternal woman is no longer valid and the new patterns of the contemporary myth of women artists are just gaining momentum. Throughout the narrative Erica Jong is re-creating this transition between the addicted and non-addicted lifestyle of Leila Sand.

Thus this essay's major concern was to elaborate on the various images, key words, de/mythologemas, metaphors... by which Erica Jong is visualising this transition. Leila Sand is struggling to transcend all the obstacles - personal, sexual,

social and professional. This results in a fierce 'obstacle race' with a number of obsessions for Leila Sand. Besides the haunting fear of flying the woman artist is struggling with a new female fear - fear of diving which is the outrageous price any creative woman still needs to pay.

We have realized that Erica Jong's specific treatment of the contemporary myth presupposes the mythologization of woman artist in her lifetime. Leila Sand is therefore viewed not only as an avid follower of her own role models but rather as a myth and a role model in her different facets - as a lover, a public figure, a mother, and an artist. Jong is quite positive in raising the profile of a Ms Have-it-all who cherishes with an equal zeal all her achievements - works of art, men, children, her sane mind. With a close eye on contemporary women artists profile we became assured that Leila's rage to live and work is far from the feminists' misconception to ban sexuality from artists' approach to life. Leila's persistent blend of art and love in her works, art periods and views has convinced us that women artists value life's abundance without excluding any traditionally banned features.

Unsurprisingly the narrative's emphasis is on the tremendous skills for creativity of contemporary women artists. We have argued that Erica Jong's creative woman has gained the right to be a fierce artist, an established celebrity but she is still denied the right to enjoy her outstanding success without any guilt and self-sabotage feelings. Those bitter feelings conjure up the extraordinary character of a mad, lonely, outcasted woman artist who does not belong to the conservative world of New Money Elite. We have understood that contemporary women artists need their sacred land of art, their natural habitat of a studio to work in privacy.

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