WILLIAM COLLINS DONAHUE
Harvard University

The Kiss of the Spider Woman: Gotthelf's "Matricentric" Pedagogy and Its (Post)war Reception

> Darin, daß die Spinne ein verwandeltes Weib, ja niemand anders als Christine ist, liegt im Grund das Entsetzliche. Es ist die geniale Erfindung Gotthelfs, und es weist darauf hin, daß und wie das Ungeheuer für ihn selber wirklich war.
>
> Walter Muschg (222)

For years, critics have read *Die schwarze Spinne* the way Gotthelf himself would have wanted, that is, as an evenhanded morality tale with universal applicability.[1] Yet some of these commentators have done so in bad faith, for they betray in various fleeting epiphanic moments, like the one quoted above from Walter Muschg's influential study, that the narrative construction of "woman" is somehow deeply at issue in this horror story. Indeed, the awareness of woman's central role in this novella, though the explicit subject of a long (and, admittedly, rather freewheeling) psychoanalytic study as early as 1925,[2] has otherwise been fairly well suppressed up to the present day.[3] Karl Fehr, the influential dean of Gotthelf scholarship, doubtless deserves a good deal of credit for this state of affairs. In a pathbreaking study of 1942, emulated in key respects by Benno von Wiese and others, Fehr put forward what he thought was "ein schlagendes Argument" against those who would see a gender-specific discourse in Gotthelf's most celebrated work: "Gotthelf wollte eben gerade nicht Menschentypen oder die Geschlechter charakterisieren, sondern beabsichtigte bewußt die Erweiterung christlicher Gesetze auf alle Formen des Menschseins. Geschlecht und Zeit spielen dabei eine untergeordnete Rolle" (64).[4]

The days of such "Großvater-Germanisten," however, those critics who unproblematically adopt the patriarchal perspective of the grandfather narrator (often identifying closely with the author due to Swiss-patriot or theological affinities), are gone forever.[5] It will be the task of the first part of this study to lay bare the rather pervasive gender polemic which makes *Die schwarze Spinne* both a cautionary and retaliatory tale against female independence. Like venomous spiders, women, we learn, must be shown their proper place. Proceeding from psychoanalytic, folklore-structuralist and de Manian insights, I shall try to show that, while the discourse remains "matricentric" on one level, the novella is at root a quite phallocentric enterprise resulting from male gender anxiety. I therefore beat a dual retreat from the universalist-moralizing approach characteristic of much of *Spinne* scholarship in claiming, first, that the text unequivocally targets women for its pedagogy, and, second, that it is motivated by a familiarly male identity crisis.

Die schwarze Spinne provides us the opportunity to inquire into the nature of horror literature, to ask whether the socio-political as well as depth-psychological issues we identify may in part explain our experience of the horrific. Yet my study is clearly also motivated by a concern with

ideology: *Die schwarze Spinne* is in wide use in the German school system—Albrecht Weber recommends it for the sixth grade and up (62)—and it is a regular on the reading lists of university German departments. If this novella is to remain a viable text for classroom use, we must learn to challenge Gotthelf, rather than to read ourselves into his worldview.

The second, and briefer, part of my study seeks to illuminate the connection between the novella's gender politics and the politics of the period in which *Die schwarze Spinne* enjoyed its greatest popularity: namely, the Hitler and postwar years. How did Gotthelf's novella collaborate with the concerns of Nazi, postwar, and "New" critics? How does the text's misogyny accommodate these quite different agendas? This brief foray into reception criticism challenges the view that the widespread popularity of Gotthelf's novella can convincingly be attributed to its belated discovery by a few Germanists. Though I make a case for viewing the novella in light of the larger cultural currents of the mid-century, my efforts here remain programmatic and suggestive rather than exhaustive.

Die schwarze Spinne as a "Matricentric" Tale Engendered by Male Anxiety

Though it is clear that Gotthelf meant to portray sinful human nature and point the way toward salvation for all humankind, he in fact wrote a strikingly "matricentric" tale, to borrow a term recently coined by Maria Tatar (96). Gotthelf's preoccupation with "bad mothers" (Christine and the *Meisterweiber*), good mothers (the self-sacrificing antidote to evil ones), and would-be (or should-be) mothers (such as *die Gotte* from the frame) virtually dominates the text and quite overshadows the evil that men do here.

Jamie Rankin has shown how typically Gotthelfian it is for the interior story in a framed narrative to address a moral shortcoming evident in the frame; and this is certainly the case in *Spinne* as well (1988, 406–07). Rankin might have noticed, however, that the moral flaws he identifies (religious indifference, vanity, materialism, and self-centeredness) are supremely associated with women, primarily with the *Gotte* of the frame narrative.[6] This godmother, whom Waidson supposes to be "uneasy in her virginity" (1953, 183), is indeed the pedagogical target of the interior stories.[7] Christine, a would-be heroine in the first interior story, is quickly unveiled as the didactic "Anti-Frau," as Bebermeyer approvingly notes, demonized for her indifference to "die gottgewollte Rolle der Geschlechter" (110). The selfish *Meisterweiber* of the second interior story come to ruin not least because they attempt to wear the pants in the family. Both Christine and the *Meisterweiber* serve as object lessons for the outgoing and flirtatious godmother of the frame story, who is bold and assertive when we first meet her, but intimidated and silent by the close of the grandfather's parable of horror.

In order to see more clearly how the interior stories are the pedagogical "answer" to the problem posed in the frame, we might take a closer look at what numerous critics have dismissed as mere flirtatious banter, i.e., the gender *altercatio* which directly precedes the first interior story. Goaded by the godmother, the marriageable young godfather Hans Uli protests that the problem with women today is their spendthrift vanity: ". . . die meisten meinten ja, um eine brave Frau zu werden, hätte man nichts nötig als ein blauseidenes Tüchlein um den Kopf . . ." (22).[8] He concludes his lament with the down-home observation that a dearth of milking cows, however grave a problem for dairy farmers such as himself, is not nearly so bad as being stuck for a lifetime with a wasteful woman ("Wenn einem die Kühe fehlten im Stalle, so sei man freilich übel geschlagen, aber man könne doch ändern; wenn man aber eine Frau

habe, die einen um Haus und Hof bringe, so sei es austubaket, die müsse man behalten" [22]).

The older godfather takes up the chauvinist cause with this *Jeremiade* on the state of women: ". . . mit dem Weibervolk ist gar nichts mehr . . . Sie haben nur Narrenwerk und Hoffart im Kopf, ziehen sich an wie Pfauen, [und] ziehen auf wie sturme Störche . . . Als ich um meine Alte buhlte . . . da mußte man noch nicht so im Kummer sein, man kriege statt einer braven Hausmutter nur einen Hausnarr oder gar einen Hausteufel" (23). The godfathers' case against women is, to be sure, part of a teasing repartee; but to leave it at that is to miss important thematic and structural links. For the allegations made here against women are addressed point for point in the grandfather's interior stories, whereas the godmother's rejoinder (she asserts that "die heutigen Buben" waste their time in pubs and chasing after bad girls [24]) is merely dismissed with laughter. Female greed, materialism, and "Hoffart" are the explicit targets of the second interior story, whereas the male fear of getting a "Hausteufel" instead of a good housewife clearly informs both of the grandfather's tales.[9]

A simple plot of good vs. evil—of good, hardworking Swiss farmers and an evil, despotic knight—thickens early on with the intervention of the devil (in the form of the Green Huntsman), who offers a speedy fulfillment of the knight's outrageous demands. Faced with the certain death of the farmers and their families, Christine accepts demonic aid on behalf of the community, but does so with considerable reservation and in the sure hope of outwitting the devil. As in the case of her folkloric cousins who are faced with similar impossible tasks and offers of supernatural assistance, Christine is clearly poised for heroic rewards. Up to this point, the story participates in that widespread genre in which the protagonist denies the devil his due, a genre which spawned that sympathetic epithet "der arme Teufel" for the perennial loser in this tale type.[10]

It is at this point that Gotthelf overlays the plot with the biblical story of the Fall, distracting our attention from the concrete social suffering imposed by the tyrant to a well-worn replay of (female) disobedience to divine commands. But if Christine, as commentators tirelessly remind us,[11] is the new Eve, she is so with a twist, for she is clearly marked with the signs of "sin" well *before* the fateful *Teufelskuß*. Her offense lies in her lack of what some today would call "family values": "Sie war nicht von den Weibern, die froh sind, daheim zu sein, in der Stille ihre Geschäfte zu beschicken, und die sich um nichts kümmern als um Haus und Kind. . . . wo sie ihren Rat nicht dazu geben konnte, da ginge es schlecht, so meinte sie" (40). And well before Christine succumbs to the age-old twin temptations of demonic aid and "female" curiosity, she is cast as a vociferous shrew ("[sie] redete . . . harte Worte gegen den eigenen Mann und gegen alle andern Männer" [38]) as well as a usurper of her husband's right to rule the roost,[12] a crime we will encounter again in the second interior story when we meet poor husband Christen.

Christine's crime cannot be to have negotiated with the devil per se, for she is clearly determined to cheat him: once the hard work of transplanting the beech trees is complete, "so brauche man ihm gar nichts mehr zu geben, weder ein Kind noch etwas anderes, man lasse Messen lesen zu Schutz und Trutz und lache tapfer den Grünen aus, so dachte Christine" (44).[13] Far from casting her in a sympathetic light—as an errant, but well-intentioned woman—Christine's confident intention to dupe the devil signifies an unforgivable hubris vis-à-vis a man. The gender politics of this scene become apparent when she surmises further that the devil can't be much cleverer than the average male: ". . . am Ende könnte man ihn übertölpeln wie die andern Männer auch" (42). Indeed, after sizing up the Green Huntsman, she assures herself: ". . . das wäre doch der einzige, der nicht zu

betrügen wäre!" (43). Christine's particular culpability is revealed here not primarily in the deal she brokers, but in her conviction that men are credulous clods susceptible to female cleverness. Christine is indicted, then, not only for dealing with the devil, but for treating him like a typical man.

Some overzealous critics, themselves caught up in the misogynistic exegetical tradition surrounding the biblical account of the Fall, have curiously embellished the famous scene of the kiss, which indelibly marks the story's demonization of woman—a scene that might best be thought of as a sort of diabolical Annunciation. The text itself tells us that Christine repeatedly attempted to repel the devil's advances; and where there is seduction, it is all on the side of *der Grüne*. Hans Bayer nevertheless finds her "dirnenhaft," representing nothing less than the Whore of Babylon (453); Reinhold Schneider suspects that she must have wanted it. In speaking of Christine's key role, he offers this gnomic insight: "Der Teufel aber vergewaltigt den Menschen nicht blindlings, er bedarf seiner Zustimmung" (221).[14] We will have cause to return to this conception of Christine as whore, but for now let us note that this searingly painful kiss, which she received as if in shock ("wiederum wie gebannt, steif und starr" [45]), positions Christine firmly between evil incarnate and the rest of the community, rendering her the first among the fallen. This dubious primacy, which conveniently casts the rest of the populace as second-degree coconspirators, can not, particularly in light of the novella's notable postwar popularity, fail to arouse our suspicion.[15]

It is enlightening to ponder for a moment the implications of Christine's subjugation, for it brings to light some of the darker aspects of sexual and social relations encoded in the text. Here we have a fairy-tale situation with real-world reverberations: a demonic, latent pregnancy which kicks in only if the woman fails to stay in line. That the inseminator is himself diabolical brings to mind not only the delivery-room accusations of many a mother, but expresses also the sense of one's body being taken over, occupied, possessed.[16] Gotthelf is always best when he exceeds his conscious pedagogical intentions.

Furthermore, the association of woman with nature and animality (a venerated, if not venerable, Western tradition) could find no more surreal an expression than in the frightening image of the birth of the spiders. Though simultaneously the site of male revisionism and projection, this scene remains a monument to the horror of multiple birth, to maternity gone berserk. The view that woman exhausts and loses herself in her biological function as mother is given full and lurid expression in Christine's own metamorphosis into the very arachnid likeness of her own offspring. It is the analogue, perhaps, of a woman reduced to childhood by overwhelming motherhood. But if this image expresses the sense of self-dissolution inherent in pregnancy and childbirth, it is also an ideologically charged image of woman as author of her own punishment.[17] Christine, the exemplar of the fruits of self-assertion, is mobilized against her own sex.

The grouping of women with children, particularly as targets of narrative disciplinary intervention is, as Tatar points out, a hallmark of 19th-century fairy tales, a genre with which *Die schwarze Spinne* has much in common.[18] Tatar brings out the conjunction of childbearing and discipline when she writes that "no condition is better designed to put woman in her 'proper' place than pregnancy" (98). It may be true, as von Wiese suggests, that Gotthelf means to instruct us all in "Gottesfurcht," or, as Karl Fehr argues, in the evils of hubris. But, in either case, it is the woman who, above all, needs to be made more fearful or less prideful, and motherhood is the primary pedagogical means.

For Christine, too, giving birth, even to a hoard of deadly spiders, is her salvation. Submission to her diabolically executed but divinely ordained role as mother allows for

her reintegration into the divine plan. Further, her loss of selfhood and reduction to animality follow directly on her defeat at the hands of the priest (78). Significantly, it is at this point that Christine, without giving up her role as menace to unbaptized innocents, becomes also the divine avenger. Her first victim in this capacity is Hans, "der gottvergessene Vater" (80); she plants the second kiss of death on her own husband, who must be punished for failing to subdue her in the first place. It is this narrative turn, some critics argue, this yoking of the self-assertive heroine under a unitary divine power, which exonerates Gotthelf from his fling with theological dualism and allows us to view the frightful scourge as "das Strafgericht Gottes"[19] rather than as an absurd plague. Unaccounted for in this view, however, is the fact that Christine's reintegration follows upon her *simultaneous* accession to both poles of male (supernatural) power.

How Christine can be used both as demonic enforcer, the death-dealing proof that cheating the devil doesn't pay, *and* as the wrath of a good God remains quite baffling. It is, no doubt, part of that larger (and equally unresolved) problem of theodicy which has bedeviled the Judeo-Christian tradition for ages. Augustine's solution was to suppose that evil had no independent existence; later thinkers tended to agree, stressing that God could, in any event, employ apparent evil to ultimately good ends. Nevertheless, the discomfort one might feel at the rather close association of woman with evil, woman as macabre terminator (regardless of whose dirty work she is doing), is not greatly relieved by the assurance that evil does not exist in its own right, or that it can be bent by a greater will. For these are precisely the qualities which have traditionally been gendered female: woman, in Gotthelf's worldview, does not properly exist independently, and her will is preeminently malleable to the will of others.

In contrast to her initial resourcefulness and decisiveness, Christine's later versatility, the remarkable ease with which she can be put at the service of either good or evil, is testimony no longer to her autonomous ingenuity, but to her instrumentality. By the time she is co-opted for God, Christine no longer has a will to lose. In other words, her pregnancy implies not only punishment but, ultimately, loss of subjectivity. Thus, the ostensibly generous theological conception which reinscribes even the darkest deeds as God's work saves Christine merely as function rather than as a full human being.

The occasional comparison of Christine with Faust—critics remind us that both made a pact with the devil[20]—is thus both fallacious and telling: Faust, after all, retains his persona as he seeks to expand the horizons of human experience. He is the equal or better of Mephisto and employs the devil to renew and redefine himself. Christine, clearly the junior partner in the settlement, is permitted no dazzling repartee with Mephisto; from the moment of that fateful kiss, she is all his. Intending to compliment the "gentler sex," Werner Günther makes the telling point that, while Gotthelf's male figures are the "mühsam Werdende," his female characters "brauchen nicht erst mühsam zu werden, sie *sind*, was sie sind, gleichsam von Jugend auf, Vollendete irgendwie schon in ihrem Jungmädchensein" (47).

Up to this point, I have taken the novella's opposition of the good woman/*Anti-Frau* at face value in order to clarify the narrative's scare tactic. Before proceeding to the second interior story, however, it will be necessary to ask how different these "options" really are, and to consider the male anxieties which motivate them. After all, how is the self-assertive woman, the woman who refuses to be "possessed" by her husband, punished except by (demonic) possession itself? How is the unmotherly woman disciplined other than with a freakish hyperpregnancy? Christine, in her chastened state, is merely the good woman to the nth degree, which is to say that in

Gotthelf's imaginative world the "options" for women come down to choosing more or less of the same.

While it is true that *Die schwarze Spinne* is at pains to show woman her (one and only) place, the tale is simultaneously concerned with defining male identity. Whereas Gotthelf and his benevolent interpreters would have the story trace a trajectory from sinfulness to submissive piety, the male functions (to speak structurally) tell a strikingly less altruistic tale: the gender division is not, finally, good men/bad women. Instead, powerful men (good or bad, real or supernatural) are throughout opposed to women as objects or instruments of male power.

Looking at the story in terms of male identity warrants revisiting that famous kiss which sets the story in motion. Whether or not Christine wanted it, it seems quite clear that she had it: the novella's imagery surrounding the kiss ("Es war . . . als ob die Geister der Nacht Hochzeit hielten . . ." [46]) and the subsequent birth of the spiders leave little doubt that we are to read that burning kiss as a sort of sexual intercourse. "For where Satan is," notes Clover, "in the world of horror, female genitals are likely to be nearby" (76). Christine thus represents something at least as anxiety-inspiring as the social independence discussed above: namely, female sexuality. The novella's binary opposition of women, then, must also be read as a projection of male ambivalence, a fictional resolution to the inadmissible proximity of female sexuality to motherhood. As Elisabeth Bronfen reminds us:

> Within psychoanalytic discourse itself the anatomy of the feminine body serves two diametrically opposed moments—extreme confirmation and extreme destabilisation of the self. The maternal body is experienced by the child as a site of wholeness and stability, with the breast as one of several partial objects that engender the feeling of unity and intactness. . . . The female genitals have, however, also served as a privileged trope for lack, castration and split and by metonymic association, as a trope for decay, disease and fatality. (11)

It is the unsettling proximity/identity of these two aspects of female anatomy—"wo dicht beim Mütterlichen das Geschlechtliche liegt"—which, for Hermann Pongs, presents a key "Einbruchstelle des Bösen" (309) and ultimately confronts him with "das schreckliche Doppelgesicht des Lebens" (310). By separating out, in typical fairy-tale fashion, the evil (sexual) woman from the good (maternal) woman, Gotthelf's novella appears to resolve not only the social but also the depth-psychological turmoil experienced by men.[21] Though this would exceed Gotthelf's conscious intentions, we may assume that, as a "purveyor of folklore," Gotthelf's text operates "more on instinct and formula than conscious understanding" (Clover 11).

Christine is punished for sex or, more precisely, for arousing male sexuality and thereby bringing home man's own bondage to instinctual desire. The punishment of unrepressible desire as well as the projection of such desire onto an other are, of course, strategies well documented by psychoanalysis. We may assume, as Sander L. Gilman does, that "images of the Other . . . reflect projections of anxiety" (22). Surely "it is because these forces [of disorder and loss of control] actually lie within and are projected outside the self that the difference is so readily defined as pathological" (24). That such fears produce "a need for a clear and hard line of difference between the self and other" (27) can be seen in the characterization of Christine, who is at once the reincarnation of Eve (and thus, the prototypical woman) *and* a grotesque caricature, a figure constrained to traverse gender extremes ranging from exaggerated masculinity (in her terminator function) to hyper-feminization (in her mass-mothering function). What is more, Gilman's observation on the source of such projection confirms the hypothesis that *Die schwarze Spinne*, though thoroughly matricentric on

one level, is still somehow all about men. The fictional resolution of this male anxiety is what concerns us here.

The transformation of Christine represents nothing less than the first act of a narrative gender reassignment in which male aggression and destructiveness become attributes of the story's principal female. The second half of this gender drama involves good husband Christen's appropriation of maternity. If it is true, as Clover notes, that "the killer function" is typically gendered male in the Western narrative tradition, then the transfer of this function to the deviant "Weib" Christine can only result in a relative exculpation of (or, at the very least, distraction from) the other male evildoers. The exploitation of the tyrant knight, for example, pales in comparison to Christine's murderous rampage, and the devil appears rather like an innocuous middleman in comparison.

If this much is rather obvious, the second aspect of Christine's masculinization is less so. Let us return to the birth of the spiders, a scene quintessentially maternal, yet here, oddly male. The labor pains notwithstanding, we should note that the emergence of the multitude of identical spiders, spilling out in ever greater quantities, each self-propelled and focused on some preprogrammed "target," is simultaneously a displaced image of male ejaculation. It is perhaps this spermatic imagery which prompted Pongs to view Christine as "ein Trieb-Orgiasmus, der weltzerstörende Formen annimmt" (310). The colonizing function of both sperm and spider explains this otherwise odd convergence of images: like the spiders released to reconnoiter, to seek and destroy, to repossess the land they invade, the myriad sperm are "commissioned" to seek out and fertilize (literally, to invade) the egg, and thus colonize the womb. The spiders' role in reestablishing harmony between God and man parallels precisely the role of the sperm in establishing the social harmony between man and woman-as-mother. This merging of gendered images, this superimposition of spermatozoan ejaculatory imagery over traditional childbirth, though fantastic, should not surprise us. It has in fact been prepared for from the very start with the "idyllic" baptism celebrated in the frame narrative. Christian baptism has long been seen by feminist theologians as (at least in part) a patriarchal encroachment on motherhood: a male appropriation of childbirth.

Since, for Gotthelf, the execution of real power is inherently male, Christine's masculinization as punishment for her sexuality is both deeply ironic and inevitable: it amounts, to be sure, to an erasure of her threatening female sexuality, but the real narrative feat is to masculinize her *as woman*, i.e., as mother. For Christine assimilates the most destructive and aggressive traits of the male killer not in spite of, but in and through, her function as mother. Such male occupation of motherhood, extended at the plot level in the second interior story, represents patriarchal ideology pushed to its precarious extreme, and therefore reveals, as Terry Eagleton notes, both patriarchy's power and its limitation: "Indeed what makes a dominant ideology powerful—its ability to intervene in the consciousness of those it subjects, appropriating and reinflecting their experience—is also what tends to make it internally heterogenous and inconsistent" (45).

Christine's transformation, then, is not only designed to show woman her place, but to carve out a larger space for male development. From this perspective, it is not her misbehavior which makes young hero Christen necessary, but his story, which, in order to be told at all, requires Christine's (and her successors') grossly deviant behavior. Clover's observation on current filmic horror can be applied to *Die schwarze Spinne*, if only we substitute the appropriate names: "Told alone, [Christen's] story would be . . . too nakedly effeminate. But with [Christine] there to define the category in far more hyperbolic terms, his story seems the very soul of moderation, the es-

sence of good masculinity" (105).[22]

The freakish gender elasticity represented in Christine "prepares" us for, and predisposes us favorably to, the more reasonable-looking gender elasticity we later witness in Christen. The conjunction in Christine of "fickle" changeability and bellicosity draws on invidious cultural clichés regarding those metamorphoses associated with hormonal variations rooted in female biological functions: menstruation, pregnancy, menopause. This image of involuntary metamorphosis of character provides the perfect foil for "proper," self-directed male metamorphosis. Christine's initial gender transgression, her encroachment on male prerogatives, may at first have seemed threatening; but, ultimately, we see that for Christine (and, therefore, for woman) changeability is mere circularity, and thus not so threatening after all. Woman is either properly contained (in the patriarchal family, in the window post) or she is the occasion for downfall. In the latter case, the horror of female independence is relieved by the certainty of recapture and recontainment. As in the modern horror, in which, according to Clover, "the female story traces a circle . . . [while] the male story is linear" (98), Christine's story belongs to the repetitive plot type labelled "ABA": she is imprisoned only to be released, only to be imprisoned once again. She is explicitly paralleled with the *Meisterweiber* of the second interior story even before she appears again "in person" to wreak havoc on the Swiss populace.

The mockery of female changeability goes hand in hand with male appropriation of transformative powers. This is evident in the figure of Christen, the downtrodden husband of the second interior story, and the novella's ultimate hero. His evolution from passivity to conquering hero involves the incorporation of the mother function: ultimately, he assumes the nurturer role not only for his own child, but, we learn, he even adopts another. He caps his course of out-mothering the mothers by assuming what the text has already rehearsed as the ultimate maternal role: self-sacrifice for the good of the child. The irony, of course, is that Christen's assumption of the mother function is coded male, because, in the context of female neglect and ubiquitous "Hoffart," Christen's mastering of the situation can be seen as an active, rescuing intervention. When Christine had transgressed gender boundaries, she was punished with loss of subjectivity and sentenced to life as repetition. Christen's appropriation of femininity is crowned with a martyr's victory: he has saved his soul, his children, and his community. In the first interior story, this role was still permitted the anonymous good mother. But by the end of the novella, Gotthelf apparently accedes to the "epic laws of Western narrative tradition," which overwhelmingly brand "triumphant self-rescue" as male (Clover 60f.). That *Die schwarze Spinne* culminates in a male savior plot should not surprise us, since it is, after all, driven and framed by the biblical masterplot of this tale type: the novella begins with the Ascension, "der Tag, an welchem der Sohn wieder zum Vater gegangen war" (4), and very nearly concludes with "Weihnacht, die heilige Nacht" (106), during which Christen's own heroism takes place.

The only problem with all this is that Christen is supposed to be demonstrating the ideal mother plot; but the very culmination of this story in self-sacrificing martyrdom implies a linear dimension, an ABC-plot of progression rather than endless repetition, i.e., precisely that which has been denied to the story's principal woman. If ideal motherhood is not utterly impossible for women in the world of Gotthelf's novella, it nevertheless seems curious that the story's most spectacular mother is a man. Gotthelf's text is thus caught in the grip of a "performative contradiction":[23] it expropriates for man the very role it would assign to woman. Though assigned the task of posing as the pedagogical *Anti-Frau*, Christine seems rather to epitomize the

woman of Gotthelf's patriarchal Biedermeier ideology.

The inclusion of the second interior story is itself somewhat curious; it has been hailed as a symmetrical structural flank as well as a graphic reminder of "die Dauer-Gefährdung" inherent in religious backsliding (Pongs 309). Once again, though it may seem that Gotthelf is targeting avarice, materialism, and irreligiosity per se, it is not coincidental that he portrays women—here, the domineering *Meisterweiber*—as the biggest offenders. The misogynistic parable is hardly subtle and requires little elucidation: whereas Christine becomes equated with her lethal offspring, the *Meisterweiber*, greedy and out of male control, are both blamed for, and paired with, the unruly and disobedient servants who can not be trusted on their own. "Schlechte Herrschaft," as Reinhold Schneider tellingly notes in 1949, is the unmistakable moral of the story, a lesson well learned, it seems, by the cowed and reticent godmother of the frame narrative. It will be useful to recall that the "Dauer-Gefährdung" which this second story is supposed to communicate emanates no longer from a tyrant or demon but exclusively from one female source.[24] Just as Christine, in her humbled arachnid state, has been tethered into divine service—God's pit bull, if you will—so, too, are the unfortunate "master-wives" now made to represent all that threatens social and religious order. Their crime is inherent in their epithet, *Meisterweiber*, a term that for Gotthelf must surely have been an oxymoron.

If we are to come to a nuanced appreciation of the textual polemics, it will be necessary to embark on a more detailed comparison of the two interior stories. Whereas the first story retains a modicum of internal tension and ambiguity, the second is didactically univocal. We saw, for example, how Gotthelf puts forth competing models of *die Spinne* in the first story. Is it "eine Buße gewaltig und schwer aus Gottes selbsteigener Hand" (58), as the priest suggests? Or is it rather "eine Plage des Bösen . . . eine Mahnung, den Pacht zu halten" (66), as most of the populace believe? And if it is a contest of supernatural powers, as the pious old woman believes ("sie traute noch auf Gott, daß er mächtiger sei als der Teufel böse" [79]), how can this so readily be reconciled to the orthodox view that the devil is God's subordinate? Though, in the second story, "Christine" continues to function both as agent and target of divine discipline, the rich theological ambiguity surrounding (and motivating) her is gone.

The first story, the narrator tells us, has to do with weighing the interests of society against those of the individual (47, 82). The farmers are faced with the task of defining which is the lesser of evils, to suffer the oppression of the evil foreign knight, Hans von Stoffeln, and thereby accept the certain death of many, or to sacrifice the life of an innocent child. The second story abolishes the moral dilemma from the very beginning: here, evil is unambiguously attributed to female greed, materialism, and, above all, to the sin of pride shared by countless fairy-tale heroines: namely, "Hoffart."[25] Though the first story makes liberal use of the Eve motif, as in the case of the husband Hans, who is "won over" (70) by Christine to betray his own wife and child, it also goes to some lengths to indict the community as coconspirators. In fact, the ensuing deaths can in part be seen as Christine's revenge for the community's attempt to fix the guilt solely on her (80ff.). This broader conception of evil disappears in the second story and is replaced by an increasingly misogynistic view.

The trouble begins as "Hochmut und Hoffart [wurden] heimisch im Tale, fremde Weiber brachten und mehrten beides" (99). These arrogant foreign women are the composite of both the exploitative foreign knight and the domineering Christine; the exposition of the second story explicitly collapses the vices of the two opposing groups from the first story onto a mother and wife team who make it their business to subju-

gate the "freundlich" and "demütig" Christen (101). The ensuing evil results rather predictably from female access to power: the *Meisterweiber* entirely rule Christen, usurping the natural, God-given order, and entirely fail to supervise their servants, who are morally adrift without proper (male) governance.[26] And just as the narrator begins to suggest some sort of collective moral guilt in an attempt to explain the second outbreak of the *Spinne* (a notion which would admittedly be difficult to square with this story's exposition), he returns to the misogynist gender polemic: "... sein [Christen's] Wille lag gebunden in seiner Weiber Willen, und dieses Gebundensein ist allerdings eine schwere Schuld für jeden Mann und schwerer Verantwortung entrinnt er nicht, weil er anders ist, als Gott ihn will" (111). This gnomic proclamation picks up on motifs from the first story (male passivity, female aggressiveness in sin) and, at the same time, reduces the somewhat differentiated problematics of that story to a transparent morality tale on "proper" gender roles.

How can we account for the striking difference in sophistication and complexity of these two stories? Why do we get a moral dilemma in one, and moral platitudes in the other? Why the theological ambiguity bordering on dualism in the first, and conservative orthodoxy in the second?[27] I would suggest that Gotthelf's second story has little to do with aesthetic symmetry (as some New Critics have suggested) and everything to do with that for which he was best known: religious didacticism. Gotthelf correctly perceived that his story was slipping beyond his homiletic intent, and thus "edited" his first, more fascinating, tale not by rewriting it (which he seldom did) but by adding on a rider which simplified the lesson for the reader. If one were to choose symbols from the story to characterize the interior tales, one might say that the first story, by setting up the good mother/*Anti-Frau* opposition, functions as the "Loch in dem Bystal," i.e., the ideological matrix into which woman must ultimately be fitted; the second story might well be seen as the "Zapf, der scharf ins Loch paßt," i.e., the rather unsubtle narrative which caps off the misogynist parable in a reductionist and fairly propagandistic manner.[28]

Having lavished attention on the interior stories, we now ought to consider the frame. At the level of discourse, it is crucial to see the frame as part and parcel of the patriarchal parable. It is the structural analogue to the *Bystal* which safely encases the spider woman. In contrast to the dynamic and labile tempo of the horrific interior tales, the frame, with its extensive and static description, nearly lulls the reader into a summer nap.[29] The feeling of security and permanence associated with the frame's plodding narrative pace—in contrast to the mayhem of arachnid metamorphoses—explains the idyll numerous critics have seen in the frame. Yet this "idyll" proves attractive not in its own right (it is not as if readers have actually preferred the frame to the interior stories) but in opposition to the fearsome female energies of the interior stories. The frame effectively harnesses the female, not by obliterating or replacing her, but by using her in a script which "entertains" as it socializes. The spider woman can—and, for narrative purposes, even should—break out of her prison occasionally, as long as this is coded as sinful and aberrant, and as long as reconfinement is a foregone conclusion. The sunny stability of the patriarchal frame provides "ein Gleichgewicht . . ., das eine dauernde Harmonie verspricht" (von Wiese 178).

On a thematic level as well, the frame stages women as the primary targets of the grandfather's narrative. The frame narrator focuses almost exclusively on the godmother's fearful reactions in order to let us know how fundamentally addressed she feels by the stories (92, 94, 95f., 121). And in the interlude between stories, the grandmother seems to understand quite clearly who is the target of these tales. She rebukes her husband for telling a story which will

one day lead local schoolchildren to believe that it was the grandmother herself who was banished to the *Bystal* for being a witch (94). The grandfather overrules her, insisting that "es kann sich vielleicht in der heutigen Zeit jemand ein Exempel daran nehmen, schaden würde es wahrhaftig nichts" (96), and goes on to tell the second tale.

Gotthelf anticipates the gap between the fantastic world of the interior narratives and the soberer world of the frame when he has the *Vetter*, one of the attentive listeners to the grandfather's gruesome tales, say: "Alles kann man kaum glauben, und etwas muß doch an der Sache sein, sonst wäre das alte Holz nicht da" (120). This mild form of skepticism—designed, from a rhetorical point of view, to absorb and neutralize the reader's own skepticism—does not, of course, seriously question the narrative ideology. Nor do the two narrators (the frame narrator and the grandfather narrator) evince any perspectival dissonance. Indeed, for Berneburg, Gotthelf and his two narrators blend quite compatibly to form the novella's "einheitliche Perspektive" (341). In contrast to Storm (e.g., *Der Schimmelreiter*), Raabe (e.g., *Die Akten des Vogelsangs*), and his own Swiss compatriot Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (e.g., *Der Heilige* or *Die Hochzeit des Mönchs*), Gotthelf employs the frame to anchor the interior narrative by means of an authority figure, rather than to reflect on the epistemological problem of perspectivism.[30]

Even if we exclude these exemplary practitioners of the genre, put aside our concern with the frame, and restrict ourselves to the first half of the 19th century, a comparative glance reveals Gotthelf's utter conservatism. Kleist's *Marquise von O...* of 1808 features a strong-minded, rather unconventional, and, up to the comic conclusion, independent heroine. Eight years later, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* parodies the representation of woman (as a purely male construct) in the puppet figure of Olimpia, whose single utterance "Ach!" is enough to inspire and sustain Nathanael's narcissistic love. Not long thereafter, Heine's brilliant fragment *Florentinische Nächte* gives us the protagonist Max, who falls in love with female statues, but discovers in himself an inveterate *Weiberfeind* when confronted with real, living women. Against this literary backdrop, it seems clear that Gotthelf's novella employs images of women that hardly question the inherited misogynistic conventions of literature and society. If this is not surprising at a time when the ultra *Weiberfeinde* Schopenhauer and Wagner dominate the cultural stage, it is a matter of some concern in the war and postwar era, the period in which *Die schwarze Spinne* becomes recycled for domestic German consumption.

Types of Reception: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and New Criticism

> Wir sahen die Spinne die Völker schlagen und gelangen unweigerlich vor den Gerichtshof unseres Gewissens.
>
> Reinhold Schneider (224)

Die schwarze Spinne is a curious latecomer to the German canon,[31] and the marked increase in interest in this "Meisterstück erzählender Dichtung überhaupt" (von Wiese) generated during the Nazi and (post)war years should give us pause. Berneburg's remarks may stand for the numerous critics who have noted the correspondence between the story and the (post)war mind-set: "Um der empfundenen Unmittelbarkeit willen hat *Die schwarze Spinne* gerade auch im letzten Weltkrieg und in den Jahren danach eine starke Wirkung geübt, während sie dem 19. Jahrhundert fern war" (306).[32] Between 1936 and 1958, Gotthelf's novella inspired six separate dramatizations, five of which ap-

peared in the postwar period.[33] It was likewise in 1936 that *Die schwarze Spinne* made its debut as a *Kammeroper*, only to be eclipsed in 1949 by yet another *Spinne* opera. This same year witnessed the return of *Die schwarze Spinne* in a cabaret ballad intended, according to Mieder, to raise "die Frage der Schuldverstrickung des deutschen Volkes" (1983, 61). Finally, it was not until after the war (and, interestingly, while reflecting on his own *Doktor Faustus*) that Thomas Mann was moved to praise Gotthelf's story.

Fully to understand this marked increase in interest at this historical juncture would require the patient efforts of reception critics approaching the phenomenon from the perspective of the sociology of literature.[34] The aim of the following survey is to suggest that the popularity of Gotthelf's most acclaimed work has to do not only with the story's technical, narrative, or even homiletic virtuosity, but with its misogyny; I contend that the gender polemic has proven suspiciously supportive of the ideological aims of each of those groups of critics (war, immediate postwar, New Critical) who celebrated the story's artistry. Yet I can only hope to reformulate, rather than exhaustively follow out, the reception agenda.

The Swiss Germanists Muschg and Fehr, largely credited with "discovering" *Die schwarze Spinne* in the 1930s, have—owing to their fundamentally "mythic" and apolitical approach—more in common with the postwar critics who are treated below. Gotthelf's appeal to Nazi critics such as Adolf Bartels is not hard to divine: like the rest of the Gotthelf oeuvre, *Die schwarze Spinne* provided a respectable piece of *Heimatkunst* which was thought to celebrate the virtues and simplicity of the countryside (as against the evil, cosmopolitan city). More to the point for our concern, Gotthelf's novella provided literary "corroboration" of the twin Nazi ideologies regarding the feminization of evil and demonization of the foreigner.[35] Moreover, Gotthelf's endorsement of the patriarchal family order entirely overlapped with at least one plank of Nazi family policy: Klaus Theweleit writes that "fascist family policy . . . lent support to the formal power of the father (demanding absolute obedience of children) and to the position of the mother as the great bearer of children" (II: 252). This convergence of ideologies on the question of woman's place may in part explain why, in 1940, the *Verlag für Militärgeschichte* saw fit to include the novella in its *Front-Bücher* series; why a few years later the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* published this novella in the *Soldatenbücherei* collection; and why, in the same year 1942, *Die schwarze Spinne* found favor at both the *Propaganda-Abteilung Ostland* (joining the ranks of the *Ostland-Kompanie-Bücherei*) and with the editors of the *Deutsche Zeitung*, who held the novella to be appropriate *Unterhaltung für die Nordfront*.[36] It is simply not persuasive to suppose that this belated enthusiasm for Gotthelf's novella—especially in Germany, for this specific readership—can be explained exclusively, or even primarily, by the appearance of a university professor's favorable treatment of the story in an academic work.[37]

At roughly the same time when *Die schwarze Spinne* was being served up to Nazi troops as suitable reading material, the novella's striking imagery was employed by the Swiss paper *Nebelspalter* to satirize the Nazi infiltration of Switzerland. The numerous black spiders (see illustration) represent—as we are explicitly told in the caption—the dreaded foreign threat: "deutsche Spitzel." In Switzerland, where Gotthelf enjoys the posthumous status of poet laureate, the association with *Die schwarze Spinne* would have been unmistakable. Though the cartoon satirizes the Nazis, there is no reason to assume that it is ironic about its own imagery (and thus, about the ideology encoded therein). Indeed, the general tenor of this humorous *Wochenblatt* seems to be, in the words of

Nebelspalter

Rorschach, 19. April 1935
61. Jahrgang Nr. 16

Der Fall Jacob

Noch immer kommen in Basel auf 10 Einwohner bloß 11 deutsche Spitzel – von einer Gefahr kann demnach nicht gesprochen werden.

Nr. 16/1935 Der in Strassburg wohnende deutsche Emigrant Salomon Berthold Jacob wird von Nazi-Spitzeln nach Basel gelockt und am 9. Februar 1935 vom Restaurant «Zum schiefen Eck» in Kleinbasel aus durch SS-Männer in Zivil nach Deutschland verschleppt. Dank der energischen Intervention des Basler Regierungsrates Ludwig erlangt Jacob seine Freiheit wieder. Ein Musterbeispiel amtlicher Zivilcourage.

Obwohl die NSDAP-Ortsgruppe Basel «nur» 200 Mitglieder zählte, waren zusätzlich in rund 30 verschiedenen Gruppen der «Deutschen Kolonie» über 4000 Hitler-Anhänger beim grossen Basler «Sieg-Heil»-Klub.

Jürg Tobler, that "es versöhnt mehr, als es verhöhnt" (Jenny 7). The fact that *Die schwarze Spinne* is exploitable by both the Nazis and their Swiss critics suggests that there is in the novella an ideological substratum of misogynistic and xenophobic myth that is useful to both sides.

There can be little doubt that soon after the war *Spinne* became the grist for fledgling efforts at postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In a popular 1947 essay reprinted twice thereafter, and titled "Und vergib uns unsere Schuld," the conservative poet of inner emigration, Reinhold Schneider, takes Gotthelf's novella as a source of consolation and guidance for managing postwar guilt. Yet, in attempting to explicate "*Unsere* Schuld" (224, Schneider's emphasis) to his German audience, Schneider unquestioningly adopts the conception of guilt, in which woman is the active and man the passive participant. Suggesting that the source of political and familial disharmony is, at root, one, Schneider summarizes the story's moral thus: "Schlechte Herrschaft, ungerechte Verwaltung ist der Anfang des Übels" (220). In his eagerness to provide some sort of explanation for the recent horrific events in Germany, Schneider explicitly reads the war experience into the grandfather's tale: ". . . waren *wir* geneigt, Gottes Eigentum für irdisches zu geben, so haben *auch wir* den Zapfen gelockert . . ." (224, my emphasis). But this good-faith effort at establishing literary parallels as a venue of orientation and hope leads to a wholesale importation of sexist models of guilt, in which Christine seems to Schneider "die lebendige Schuld" itself. Beyond this, there is in Schneider's essay a replication of the novella's bifurcation and reappropriation of the "feminine": the seductress/instigator role remains married to the killer function, but it is now not maternity but the victim role which is simultaneously prescribed to women, yet inhabited by the "wir" of Schneider's rhapsodic essay. At any rate, the intense need to "master" the recent past seems to have provided little opportunity to step back and evaluate the novella's gendered distribution of guilt and responsibility.

In describing a scene which Erich Kästner lifted from Gotthelf's novella for a 1949 cabaret *Lied*, Wolfgang Mieder further documents the novella's apparent amenability to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The scene in question, Mieder argues, "eignete sich gerade . . . dazu, einem deutschen Schriftsteller kurz nach den Grausamkeiten des nationalsozialistischen Regimes als erneutes Symbol für die Frage nach der Schuld des einzelnen und auch der Kollektivschuld zu dienen" (5).[38] We have already seen, however, that the individuated "Schuld des einzelnen" (as opposed to the more amorphous, passive guilt of the community) is narratively privileged and gendered female. Like Schneider, Mieder takes the novella's portrayal and assignment of guilt as a timeless representation of the human condition per se, "eine Darstellung der menschlich-allzumenschlichen Schuldverstrickung" (6), and thus cannot perceive the gender polemic at work. This "humanist" perspective, minus the politico-historical allusions to National Socialism, is precisely the limitation of the New Critics discussed below.

Reading *Spinne* as an allegory for the Hitler period—a dubious undertaking in any event—can only result in the repeated instrumentalization of women: from this perspective, Christine functions as a blocking figure, a filter or deflector of guilt. Her intercession, as we saw, buffers the guilty masses from direct contact with evil, allowing them to think of their sin as a failure to maintain traditional gender roles.[39] We have seen how the intrusion of the devil scrambles the morality tale, introducing two competing sources of evil (Hans von Stoffeln and the Green Huntsman). The image of the victimized farmers, caught between two evils, and "seduced" into wrongdoing by a foreign woman, cannot but have been appealing to postwar Germans.

The allure of *Die schwarze Spinne* at this juncture was, no less than that of Borchert's immensely popular *Draußen vor der Tür*, or Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General*, that it furnished a picture of Germans themselves as victims. If Hitler is the devil or, as Schneider suggests, even the spider itself, the German masses must surely be the Swiss farmers, who learn from the didactic narrator that theirs is a sin of omission, a lack of vigilance, a failure to oppose another's evil. But our objection must ultimately go beyond the gendered and self-serving conception of guilt to the nucleus of the allegory itself. For the lesson to be learned by the farmers—"daß die Schuld an einer Seele tausendmal schwerer wiege als die Rettung von tausend und abermal tausend Menschenleben" (47)—has no place in coming to terms with the Nazi past. Gotthelf's fiction puts the Swiss populace in a real "one of us has to go" type of bind, a fiction which frankly has little applicability to the Hitler period, however strong its attraction must have been. The unacceptability of the entire allegorical strategy becomes evident when one realizes that "one of us," in this specious conception, is the Jews, and that it was not one, but six million.[40]

When *Spinne* became the darling of New Critical pursuits, a new, but related, impediment to recognizing the misogynistic polemic emerged. The conception of the "verbal icon" as autonomous signifier, which somehow bespeaks the essential experience of humankind, is not very different from Schneider's (and, more recently, Berneburg's) treatment of the text as a conduit of metaphysical reality, a sort of latter-day scripture. To be sure, the New Critics generally dispense with theological categories; but the "authority" imputed to the text, however reconceptualized, remains intact. New Critics were enamored of the text as one might be of a well-wrought urn: to qualify as high art the work in question had to display tensions in harmonious resolution. "The essential structure," writes Cleanth Brooks in his famous distinction between scientific and poetic language, "is a pattern of resolved stresses . . . It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations developed through a temporal structure" (Adams and Searle 1037).

This premise, which pervaded German *textimmanent* criticism of this period no less than American, found its expression primarily in spatial imagery. Accordingly, Horst Hömke celebrates the novella's architectonic symmetry: "ein gelungenes Bauwerk mit der harmonischen Aufgliederung der Grundpfeiler" (171); similarly, Walter Muschg notes that the novella's real hero is the farmhouse itself: ". . . es ist das Haus der Welt selber in seiner ewigen Harmonie" (228). The following question, which Hömke recommends for classroom discussion, illustrates how the New Critical approach short-circuits the apprehension of any textual polemic: "Warum ist das Zusammenwirken von Rahmen und Kern spannungsgeladen und doch harmonisch?" (172). Isn't this rather like the ruse of the criminal investigator who asks the suspects *why* they committed the murder, rather than *whether* they did so in the first place?

The New Critical program, in its silence on politics, exclusion of history, and premise of ultimate harmony, was certainly not incompatible with (rather compromised) attempts to read the text as a way of coping with the Nazi past. Like Schneider, the New Critics cannot have been keen on disclosing a polemic which would have undermined their self-image as purveyors of lasting verities on the human condition. Wimsatt and Beardsley, authors of seminal New Critical manifestos, contend that ultimately the poem—the favorite genre of these critics— "is about the human being" (Adams and Searle 1016). This conviction itself virtually insures a blindness to narrative which sharply divides human beings along gender lines. In the case of *Die schwarze Spinne*, the belief that the poet's task "is finally to unify experience" (Brooks in Adams and Searle 1040) cannot but ob-

scure or distort a discourse which challenges the putative "unity" of humankind. That the New—or *textimmanent*—Critics repeatedly find the "achieved harmony" (Brooks) which, by definition, all great literature holds out, is no great surprise: it is a foregone, but erroneous, conclusion, yet one which goes a long way in explaining why the gender-specific discourse—recognized to some extent by Graber almost seventy years ago—has been suppressed by Fehr and his disciples to this very day.

A third "outbreak" of the spider woman occurred as Gotthelf's *Spinne* was pressed into ideological service during the Adenauer restoration, a time when most wartime working women were reintegrated into domestic bliss, when German grade schools compensated for their lack of adequate historical materials with literature such as this,[41] and when the image of a macabre outbreak of evil bracketed by a peaceful and idyllic frame must have provided untold consolation.[42] If the novella's interior stories of death and destruction inspired in the minds of Germans parallels to the *Hitlerzeit*, the relative calm and stability of the frame must have suggested parallels (felt or merely desired) to the *Adenauerzeit*. The image of the grandfather, which permeates the frame, certainly corresponds to the conception of the first *Bundeskanzler* as "patriarchal," as "father figure," as "the old man" (Craig 44, 55).[43] Since its critical debut, *Die schwarze Spinne* has thus been subject to powerful political pressures and a bevy of allegorical readings,[44] none of which has been amenable to disclosing Gotthelf's instrumentalization of women. The novella has served as a screen onto which the fears and tensions of recent generations have been projected; it is time, now, to pay closer attention to the texture of the screen itself, and to admit that it was never the neutral backdrop that it was touted to be. For Walter Muschg, *Die schwarze Spinne* conjured up "die Pest, die Tyrannei, die Bosheit der Menschen, den Krieg, die Leidenschaft, den Teufel, . . . alles Grauen der Welt in allen seinen Gestalten" (222). Is it mere coincidence that, for him, the spider was above all a woman?

Notes

[1]This article is dedicated to Alfred and Waltraut Doppler. An earlier draft was presented at the ACTFL/AATG Annual Meeting, Chicago, 20 November 1992; a generous grant from the Harvard Graduate Student Council made it possible for me to attend this conference. I am most grateful to Dorrit Cohn, Maria Tatar, Rachel Freudenburg, and, above all, to Marie Collins Donahue for valuable criticism and discussion. For the illustration accompanying this article, as for many other helpful suggestions, my thanks to Wolfgang Mieder.

[2]Gustav Hans Graber's essay, expanded and reissued in book form in 1952, has consistently been dismissed by Germanists. Graber's approach—he confusedly uses the novella to support psychoanalysis while employing the latter as a theoretical tool to investigate the former—is surely untenable. Yet, in overlooking Graber's insights (on the narrative's privileging of woman as mother, on Christine as the site of gender-mixing), scholars have thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

[3]Though without attention to gender analysis per se, Lindemann has nevertheless drawn our attention to Gotthelf's postulation of a conservative, patriarchal ideal from the *Biedermeierzeit* as a universal, divinely ordained order (189 *et passim*).

[4]Fehr's analysis is flawed in a number of respects. First, in order to achieve symmetrical balance, he has conveniently omitted the devil. Second, he has not accounted for differences in the significance or narrative duration of figures (Hans von Stoffeln, for example, plays a relatively negligible role as compared to Christine). Finally, and most importantly, Fehr was unable to avail himself of the recent distinction between biological *sex* and culturally constructed *gender*. While it is fair to assume that, for Gotthelf, the misogynistic discourse was perhaps virtually invisible due to the prevailing attitudes of his time, it is no longer convincing a century and a half later, when Fehr denies any

"Eindruck geschlechtlicher Einseitigkeit." Fehr's view has held sway in the critical literature; not only has he himself adhered to it in the decades following its promulgation in 1942, but Benno von Wiese (193), Albrecht Weber (60), and others have continued to subscribe to this "Fehr doctrine."

[5]To this group, I would count above all Fehr, Ernst Berneburg (see esp. 319–23), Werner Günther, Reinhold Schneider, and Walter Muschg, who refers to the *Großvater* narrator as "dieser allwissende Alte" (226). The second major approach to *Die schwarze Spinne* is marked by the apolitical, aesthetic interests of the "New" or *textimmanent* critics of (primarily) the postwar period, such as Johannes Pfeiffer, R. E. Keller, Hughes, von Wiese, Josef Kunz, Horst Hömke, Pierre Cimaz. These two main branches are not, as the case of Muschg demonstrates, mutually exclusive. Two other less well-traveled approaches are (1) politico-historical studies (Jost Hermand, Winfried Bauer, Klaus Lindemann) and (2) the theological-historical study of Hans Bayer. The best and most up-to-date reception history can be found in Lindemann (215–33).

[6]It is the *Gotte*, for example, who alone is singled out for inattentiveness during the baptism ("aber zu rechter Andacht brachte es die Gotte nicht" [19]), who is characterized as bent on gossip and given to "Neugierde." Further, the *Jungfrau*'s tardiness to the ceremony is explicitly related to her vanity (14f.). Finally, the humor of the bountiful breakfast scene, in which prodigious amounts of food signal social standing (and in which the *Gotte* as well as the mother are gently ridiculed for their insincere prattle) is closely associated—as are the later meals—with women. Rankin's own catalogue makes it clear that the moral shortcomings under didactic fire are primarily those associated with the women of this scene.

[7]The plethora of critics who have noted parallels in the characterization of the *Gotte* and Christine strengthens the argument concerning the didactic connection between the two. See Waidson 1953, 183; Lindemann 194–97; Muschg 222–26; Keller 8f.; Balfour 164; Hughes 259.

[8]All textual citations are from Jeremias Gotthelf, *Die schwarze Spinne* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1950). I have chosen this edition (which, except for some minor spelling and punctuation variants, is identical to the standard edition of Rudolf Hunziker and Hans Bloesch) for its greater accessibility.

[9]The godmother as narrative target arises not only from her instigation of, and participation in, this gender debate, but also from her intrusion on male prerogatives: it is she who leads the women over to the pipe-smoking men just before the grandfather begins his narratives (25).

[10]This tale type is perhaps better known as "der geprellte Teufel." See Mieder 1983, 27ff.; also, cf. Berneburg 334f.

[11]Muschg 220f.; Pongs 307; Waidson 182.

[12]Though the following description of Christine's husband follows the depiction of Christine's rendezvous with the devil, it describes a relationship which clearly predates this encounter: "Christines Mann aber, der gewöhnt worden war, daß sein Wort erst durch die Zustimmung seiner Frau Kraft erhielt . . ." (48).

[13]Though the narrator tells us that Christine would have liked to have included the men in the deal—if for no other reason than to share the responsibility in case things go wrong—he assures us in the same breath that she never really doubted her ability to outsmart this devil: ". . . der Glaube verließ sie nicht, daß sie listiger als der Grüne sei und wohl ein Einfall kommen werde, ihn mit langer Nase abzuspeisen" (44f.).

[14]Whereas Bebermeyer noted a transgression of divinely ordained gender roles, Pongs faults her for violation of Jungian archetypes: "Grade wer als Frau naturgegebene Bindungen verachtet, aus Wildwuchs, Geltungssucht, Abenteuertum, der gerät schnell an den Teufelskuß . . . Wohl wählt Satan die bindungslose, abenteuernde Frau" (309f.).

[15]Interestingly, it is Christine herself who predicts that she will bear the brunt of the blame should things go badly (49). Though this fate is virtually assured her by means of the Eve motif, it must be said that the narrator is in this first interior story at some pains not to let the menfolk entirely off the hook. True, Christine has not revealed the terms of the deal (i.e., that an unbaptized child is required), but the narrator makes it clear that the men are not as innocent as they pretend (50), i.e., the topos is so widespread that they know what is at stake. Further, whereas it is Christine who openly chides the devil for his outrageous demand, it

is the farmers who first begin to calculate "wie viel mehr wert sie alle seien als ein einzig ungetauft Kind" (47). Note that this gesture, which complicates, but does not fundamentally challenge, the "Eve role" of woman as primary locus of guilt, is entirely lacking in the second interior story.

[16]Today, demonic possession as a metaphor for pregnancy seems humorously exaggerated unless one eliminates the modifier "demonic." Then it becomes, as Adrienne Rich has pointed out, a more or less adequate designation for the maternal experience of prenatal manipulation and alienation.

[17]On parallels to this in folktales and fairy tales, see Tatar 103.

[18]The frame narrator, for example, refers to the *Gotte*, using the fairy-tale nomenclature "das arme Kind" (12). Furthermore, the exclusive focus on the spider in the search for the legendary/folkloric source of Gotthelf's novella has obscured the many broader narrative features which Gotthelf shares with his contemporaries, the Brothers Grimm. Both were attempting, at roughly the same time, to fashion pedagogical tales from biblical and secular strands of narrative. Rather than as the harmonious thing of beauty which the New Critics professed to see in the novella, *Die schwarze Spinne* can, from the perspective of folk- and fairy-tale research, be seen as an ungainly amalgam of folkloric plots—initially, invoking the "cheat the devil" plot, intersplicing a "betrayed lover" segment (Christine's "betrayal" of the Green Huntsman), grafting on the biblical story of Eve, inserting a portion of the "promises must be kept" tale type, etc. (cf. Tatar 62, 84). This differs somewhat from Mieder's conception of the story as the confluence of three *Sagentypen* (1983, 27f.).

[19]Despite his strenuous efforts, Bayer does not succeed in explicating this theological conundrum (458).

[20]The Faust comparison is a persistent yet peripheral point in the critical literature. While points of similarity have rather casually been implied, important contrasts are as yet lacking. See Weber 55, Pongs 307f., Bebermeyer 108.

[21]Though Freud does not (at least, not in *Traumdeutung*) designate the spider as a symbol for female sexuality, there is a long tradition which clearly does; see Lindemann 16. Freud does, however, connect woman's weaving with her "genital deficiency" (cf. Miller 289, n. 3).

[22]The connection between *Die schwarze Spinne* and modern horror films is not at all arbitrary. As already suggested, the novella can profitably be seen from the perspective of folk- and fairy tales. Clover observes: ". . . the fact is that horror movies look like nothing so much as folktales—a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what are in effect variants: sequels, remakes, and ripoffs" (10); she herself justifies the connection with specific reference to 19th-century literature (76). I am particularly indebted to Clover's Chap. 2, "Opening Up," for this portion of my interpretation. If one were to elaborate the model she offers there, one could argue that Hans von Stoffeln, the evil knight featured at the beginning of the first interior story, represents the macho counterpart to the "new man" Christen, and therefore needs to be expelled from the narrative.

[23]The term, which incorporates de Man's definition of "the literary," is Denys Turner's requirement for ideology; quoted by Eagleton 24.

[24]Cf. Waidson 1953, 183.

[25]See Tatar 103.

[26]Pointing to the lascivious *Knecht*, von Wiese (who, in fact, is following Fehr on this point) argues for a gender parity regarding the *Auslöser* of evil. Yet this attempt to even the gender scorecard flies in the face of von Wiese's own observation that Christine is triplicated in the second interior story (in the figure of Christen's mother, his wife, and the hysterical "wildes Weib" with whom he comes into conflict), not to mention the spider itself (see 189ff.).

[27]For a contrasting view, see von Wiese (192), whose enthusiasm for the second story has to do with its celebration of male virtues, as well as with his own transparent misogyny: he speaks, without irony, of Christine's "Bereitschaft zum listigen weiblichen Betrug" (180).

[28]Is the novella so stained by objectionable ideology that one can scarcely enjoy its aesthetic pleasures? While each reader will decide this matter for him/herself, the above analysis suggests a differentiated rather than an all-or-nothing approach. The second story, which is the locus of the most intense misogynist invective, must, I think, be seen as an ideologically objectionable postscript. The first interior tale, which comprises the bulk of the novella, surely partakes of unmistakably sexist topoi, but nevertheless offers a comparatively more complex

moral and ideological matrix. On a psychoanalytic level, however, we have seen that the second interior story is deeply motivated (in fact, motivates the first) and thus not easily jettisoned. Perhaps the second interior story can be "rescued" for contemporary audiences by reading its gender polemic as transparent "hyperbolic parody," despite the fact that Gotthelf espoused it earnestly. The term I am suggesting as a reader strategy is employed by Bronfen to designate an authorial tactic (see her discussion of Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* 415ff.). Similarly—though not referring to *Die schwarze Spinne* as such—Nancy K. Miller urges us to "overread," i.e., "to read for Arachne," in order to "retrieve those texts from the indifference of the aesthetic universal" (287f.). This approach seems particularly advisable in light of the New Critical stranglehold on the novella.

[29]For a careful analysis of narrative tempo, see Balfour.

[30]In fact, *Die schwarze Spinne* evinces precisely "the lack of self-reflection" (153) which conspires with "a normed discourse that excludes otherness" (17)—features that, for Robert C. Holub, are exemplary of 19th-century German realism. This, interestingly, despite the story's liberal use of myth, folk-, and fairy-tale components. Cf. Holub's discussion of "the xenophobic nature of realism" with regard to C. F. Meyer's *Der Heilige* (Chap. 6).

[31]On this, see Lindemann 224.

[32]Others who have noted—but rarely reflected upon—the novella's particular appeal to the postwar *Zeitgeist*: Waidson 1953, 184; Muschg 219; Schneider 224 *et passim*; Mieder 5f., 8 (see also his *Erläuterungen und Dokumente* 63); Bebermeyer 107f. J. R. Forster reports an increase in the number of translations during the war and postwar period; by 1954, he can even speak of "the ubiquitous *Schwarze Spinne*" (209). In 1955, Waidson writes of a general Gotthelf renaissance in the critical literature, declaring that the author's reputation "stands higher than at any previous time" (514).

[33]These data are culled from Juker (216) and Mieder (1983, 57–62), whose accounts vary somewhat. The most recent dramatization of *Die schwarze Spinne* is the 1988 play (of the same title) by Hansjörg Schneider.

[34]A more exhaustive study would, for example, undertake a country-by-country analysis, discriminating in particular the Swiss from the German reception.

[35]On the feminization of evil during the Nazi period, see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 1, esp. "Woman as Aggressor" and "Mothers" (63f. and 100f., respectively).

[36]The editions in question are fully identified under item numbers 52, 1122, 1126, 1128 in Juker's Gotthelf bibliography, which contains the most comprehensive publishing data on *Die schwarze Spinne*, in addition to an exhaustive listing of secondary literature through 1975; see esp. 211–18.

[37]The book in question is Walter Muschg's *Gotthelf: Die Geheimnisse des Erzählers* (1931); cf. Mieder 1983, 48.

[38]Mieder goes a good deal further in suggesting analogies between the fictional world of *Die schwarze Spinne* and the Nazi period. Speaking of the outbreak of innumerable spiders, he writes: "Das aber erinnert sofort auch an die auf Tausende von Kleidungsstücken und Fahnen aufgenähten und an Wänden aufgeklebten spinnenartigen Hakenkreuze der Hitlerzeit. Die Geburt des deutschen Hitlerreiches kommt so der zeitlosen Darstellung der Spinnengeburten aus Christines Wange in Gotthelfs Erzählung gleich" (6). This rather casual comparison raises a number of problems, for it seems to imply a certain inevitability of the Third Reich, and/or that it fulfills some divine plan. In addition, Mieder's insistence on "das Zeitlose des Geschehens" and the homogeneity of human guilt while simultaneously espousing *Die schwarze Spinne* as a historical allegory of the Nazi period implies a relativization of this era. Similarly, Berneburg opposes theological (read "real") to social (read "mundane") categories of evil (314, 328). This type of thinking does little to focus on the particular social manifestations of National Socialism in Germany from 1933–1945. On the shortcomings in general of the mythic approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, see Ryan 23f.

[39]Bayer suggests that the guilt of the populace (and, in particular, of Christine's husband) is not so much a share in the deal with the devil as a failure to reform the wayward Christine: "Auch die Gemeinschaft der Bauern versagt, da sie die Hure Babylon weder bessert noch 'absondert'" (456).

[40]Typical of his time, Schneider fails to name the Jewish victims. But in his schema, it is clear that the unbaptized child—"Gottes Ei-

gentum"—represents the Jews. The patent inadequacy of the sacrificed innocent to represent the Holocaust may explain Schneider's sudden vagueness in an otherwise explicitly allegorical reading.

[41]Meier and Schuster attest to the place of Gotthelf's *Spinne* in the school curriculum; Gordon Craig relates that no satisfactory history curriculum addressing the Nazi period was in place before 1962 (75).

[42]Benno von Wiese's enthusiasm for the frame—and, in general, for the story's upbeat message regarding the regeneration of a God-fearing, historical world by means of self-sacrifice—must be seen in this light. Friedrich Sengle's assessment of the frame's capacity, "dem erschreckten Leser das Gefühl der Geborgenheit wiederzugeben," also sheds light on the novella's postwar function (quoted by Cimaz 374).

[43]We could push this nexus of the literary and the political even further and suggest that the novella's strategy of confining the female Other (remember that Christine is defined in addition as "foreign") was comfortably analogous to the political policy of "containment," which sought to hem in the feared political Other, i.e., the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries.

[44]Pongs sees "sexuelle Dämonen" (306) in the lifting of traditional sexual tabus. He is writing during the decade of the sexual revolution; though published in 1967, his paper dates from 1961, the year the pill was introduced (cf. 309, 311). Hömke, writing for teachers in 1959, recommends that students be reminded of the time before the currency reform (1945–1948) in order to appreciate the dilemma of the farmers in the first interior story; the materialism of the *Bundesrepublik* in the 1950s, he suggests, should help students understand the outbreak of the second spider scourge (174). Meier and Schuster recommend in 1984 that "der Gegenwartsbezug" be constructed by asking students about the "Chaotisch-Bedrohliches in unserer Zeit," such as the threat of nuclear annihilation (127).

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