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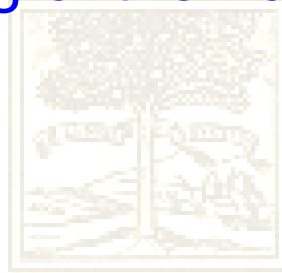
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Display of Women in Caricatures at the Beginning of the 20th Century



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Display Of Women In Caricatures At The Beginning Of The 20th Century

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Research topic

This investigation analyzes the female caricatures that contain the image of the “emancipated woman.” This research topic has a long tradition. There are investigations that look at images from the 15th and 16th century. The caricatures that are addressed in this essay originate from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. During this time, the German Reich (as it was called back then) experienced the so-called first women’s movement.

On the one hand, there will always be a “look back” at earlier times to determine the similarities and differences regarding how women are/were presented. Furthermore, the topic of “women’s liberation” is still relevant, e.g. in light of the current financial and economic crises where some social-political figures debate on how women can be “steered back” into the reproductive realm.

Sources

The satirical publications [Simplicissimus](#) and [Jugend](#) have artistically reflected upon and interpreted women’s struggle for emancipation and equality. No other satirical magazine has been as frequently examined as the *Simplicissimus* by art historians for a variety of studies to illustrate German history. Although the woman is one of the most popular “objects” of caricature, there have been hardly any discussions on the different themes of femininity. There are hardly any studies addressing the social/political position of the woman and/or an artist’s image(s) of women.

Caricature definition/The term “caricature”

This essay applies a wide use of the term “caricature” (see [Chapter 8 of the Educational Package on Historical Research](#)). Reumann determines that caricatures aim to “(...) use a pointed content or exaggerated form to make fun of, attack or comment on something.” (see: Reumann (1969): 67).

The state of research

As stated above, there are only a few studies that address the topic of feminine themes in caricatures. At the start of the 20th century, a few books appeared on the topic of women in caricature. However, many of these texts were a non-critical reproduction of anti-feminist men’s jokes and anecdotes.

A remarkable observation of the portrayal of women in caricature is found in the work of the politically active cultural historian and publicist Eduard Fuchs, who published a thematic variety of illustrative material. His ideological tendencies borrow from the analyses of Marx and Engels.

Upon its release in 1906, the work was soon sold out.

Using caricatures, Fuchs’ aim is to raise awareness about “*the double standard of economic and gender-related repression of the woman, without raising false hope of her emancipation via the women’s movement.*” (Bovenschen/Gorsen (1976):25).

Fuchs' work applies illustrations exclusively from the European cultural realm originating from the end of the 15th century to the end of the 19th century.

Fuchs argued that the woman in society is not allowed to act primarily as a person, but is instead defined as a gender being (see Fuchs 1973a).

He addresses the so-called "woman's issue" not as a question of gender, but as an overall social issue whose solution could only be found in overcoming the existing social order (see Bovenschen/Gorsen 1976:12).

For Fuchs, the envisioned gender duality is biologically founded: Anthropology does not allow femininity and creativity to exist alongside one another. (see Bovenschen/Gorsen 1976: 18)

In spite of this now (mostly) antiquated notion with its discriminatory biological argument, Fuchs' work is a highly comprehensive collection of illustrations on the topic. In addition, it is one of the first to introduce a historical-materialistic approach into the research on art and cultural history. (see Fuchs 1973a)

The function and effect of caricatures

The aim of a caricature and/or of its artist includes: criticizing, shedding light on something, teaching, convincing, revealing, uncovering, or trying to make a statement. However, it can also dissolve away into a nihilistic, destructive, and defamatory illustrative language. Over the course of history, caricature has often been used for the purposes of propaganda.

In this essay, a few caricatures will be examined as examples to analyze their respective functions.

The chapters 'effect of caricatures' and 'The use of caricatures in the classroom'

will also provide a determination of the effect caricatures might have had on their recipients when they were first published.

Interpretation

Interpretation can be done in many ways: iconically, socio-historically, ideologically critically, or thematically narratively. Incorporating all or only some of these aspects is possible. When caricatures from another era are applied in today's teaching for the purpose of interpretation, the scheme in [Chapter 8 of the Educational Package on Historical Research – Studying History Online](#) can be some help.

Research question

How is the social transformation of the role of women (determined by economic and political changes) reflected in aesthetic representations, particularly caricatures?

The investigation time frame, as mentioned, is the time around the turn of the 19th into the 20th century.

The following will discuss a few illustrative topics. One or more caricatures will be analyzed for each topic.

Modern marriages

There is hardly any topic which has been so frequently used by artists for satirical representation as that of marriage. At the same time, the representations of this specific form of gender relation contain across-the-board prejudices to a degree like no other topic (see Killisch 1988: 189)

Images that depict the conduct and position of women within the constellation of marriage exist from as early as the 16th century. An example is the frequently-modified theme of the "battle against trousers." (see caricature in [Der Kampf um die Hosen 1500](#)) and *Der Kampf um die Hosen* (1700) in Fuchs, S. 68

The quarrelsome, dominant wife has also enjoyed a century-long iconographic continuity (see caricature [Die Dame und der Affe](#)) Depending on the era, the function of each of these images of women varied.

But when each of these functions is abstracted, it's safe to say that the ideological power of these negative portrayals of women (and wives), albeit to a lesser degree, remains steady to this day. At the end of the 19th century, *Simplicissimus* exposed the reader to traditional stereotypes of women in spite of a changed social background. Merely the aesthetic covering was modified.

Examples:

The cold-blooded, unfaithful wife with the constant tendency towards excess – and her cheated-on husband (see caricature [Ein Ehering](#))
The quarrelsome wife who has her husband under her thumb
The dumb housewife standing her post at the oven
The stereotypical housewife and mother

These images are in contrast to the so-called “new woman,” the emancipated woman who in 1890 stepped onto the social scene. This image of women quickly made it into the sphere of satirical magazines. The following two examples are to be understood as caricature answers to the discussion on marriage reform around the turn of the 19th century:

“And Mr. Graf, what do men like you provide us young ladies with in marriage?” –

“Our souls, my dear.” (see caricature: [Gute Aussichten](#))

The latent irony that resounds from the question is clear. The attractive lady won't be content simply with the soul of the bald-headed gentleman.

She skeptically examines her male counterpart. Her self-confident demeanor, and her provocative, aggressively posed question underscore this impression.

Reznicek's female image in this picture no longer corresponds to the image of a shy, naïve, helpless girl from a nice home who defenselessly lets a husband be found for her. In all likelihood, this young lady will be having nothing to do with the structures that require women to conform to the norms of “typical” marriage (see Killisch 1988: 191).

“Evil progress” is the title of the depiction of a couple whose publisher is also Reznicek (please see [this website](#) or the caricature [Böser Fortschritt](#))

“You know, if you don't have any more money, just get married” is the laconic suggestion of a young woman to her lover.

“You're telling me! Broads these days are degenerate. They don't have ideals any more. None of them are giving themselves up.”

There's no mistaking this caricature: The traditional gender relations are increasingly out of control.

The repressive mentality of the so-called “lords of the manor,” i.e. men who expect or want to maintain absolute power over their wife is satirically addressed in this picture.

Dudovich's “Amazon” (please see [this website](#) or the caricature [Die Amazone](#)) embodies the classic emancipated woman, first of all through her demeanor, second of all through her attitude towards marriage.

The beach vixen puts her hands squarely on her hips and proclaims:

“I'd like to see the hurricane that can blow me into the harbor of marriage!”

Socio-political background

The members of the first women's movement fought for more rights for women, i.e. concrete rights for women to have certain professions and/or have a career at all. In addition, they fought for the right to vote and the right to be enrolled at a university.

The goal of the proletarian women's movement was, among other things, equal pay, in addition to the right have an abortion.

Today, in the year 2009, unions fight with the slogan “Equal pay for equal work” to achieve the goal stated above. Germany has an average difference of 23% between what women and men earn. This makes clear

the relevance of the women (in caricature) resp. gender topic, especially regarding its use as a topic in school lessons.

The lack of willingness to marry on the part of some women, which is represented by Dudovich's caricature, has many causes.

Hedwig Dohm, one of the fighters of the first women's movement, said:

"The traditional marriage with the dominant man, with its hard-set norms and restrictions, no longer corresponds to the *geist* of today, or the development of the woman."

(Dohm, Hedwig 1909 zit. nach Kilisch 1988:278)

Instead of customary, conventional marriage that might be done for financial reasons, new marriage forms such as friendship, giving marriage a trial run, serial marriage, or open marriage were presented. This turned into a feeding frenzy for one caricaturist, as an "open marriage" can easily be construed as promiscuity. (see caricature in [Eine Wohltäterin der Menschheit](#))

But what women's rights activists were in reality aiming for was the elimination of the form of legally binding marriage – the marriage certificate. Instead, love, the so-called "free love" should form the basis of a relationship.

It should be mentioned in this context that some caricaturists accused the women's rights activists of not being able to find a husband. In the eyes of the caricaturists, their attempts to be more than just a wife and mother were mere pretexts.

The underlying assumption of this accusation helps generate the image of the "ugly" woman.

Ugly typification

A few of the so-called ugly typifications of the active, professional, political woman can be found in *Simplicissimus* from the period investigated. But at the beginning of the 20th century, this imagery lost its absoluteness which it possessed in 19th century satire and earlier

(see Killisch 1988: 220f)

This style was directed not only towards emancipated women, as shown in the example (see caricature in [Die neueste Haarmode für junge Damen](#))

For the last significant topic that relates to socio-political change and how it is addressed by the medium of caricature, we now take a look at the mother and motherhood.

Motherhood

According to 19th century caricaturists, women at the time were blowing off their "motherly duties" onto their husbands so that they could pursue their own pleasure

(see caricature [Frankfurter Sonntagsfeier](#))

At the end of the 19th century, and at the start of the 20th century, caricaturists found a sanctity in questioning the traditional role of mother: They accused women of having a distanced, cold, rejecting relationship with their children (see caricature [Ob Sie ein Herz hat, ich höre absolut nichts](#)).

These negative dispositions were projected by them onto women's rights activists, artists, and the so-called ladies of society see caricature [Radikale Frauenrechtlerinnen](#)).

All females not avowing themselves to motherhood became a target of derision.

This tendency can still be identified in the present day as well. If didactically prepared in an acceptable fashion, these images can be applied in school lessons.

Summary of the caricatures investigated

Compared to the other topics found in *Simplicissimus* and *Jugend*, illustrative satire that deals with the topic of women's liberation comprises a minority of the content.

Simplicissimus aimed its criticism mainly towards social and political evils within the Wilhelmine society of the time.

A favorable acceptance by the caricaturists regarding women's liberation can be only partially identified.

Satire was at its most harassing towards its goal (women) when emancipation was perceived as a threat to "male" rights and privileges (e.g. in the political sector). A positive-amusing depiction quickly turns into a negative-hostile-destructive caricature criticism. The same occurred when the caricaturists perceived women's professional activities or their striving towards them as rivalry.

The work of Gulbranssons on the topic of women's suffrage should be excluded from this evaluation. His criticism is based more on the analysis of societal relations, not polemics.

The effect of caricatures

Today's empirical-analytical classifications are not able to clearly determine to what extent the caricatures presented above on the topic of "women's liberation" were able to shape the opinions and consciousness of the recipients at the time. In other words, their actual impact can only be speculated upon. The effect a caricature has on its recipient depends on his/her artistic perception, intellect, and knowledge of a variety of social and political phenomena.

(see Killisch 1988: 222).

The use of caricatures in the classroom

As already shown in in [Chapter 8](#) of the Educational Package on Historical Research , many scientists emphasize that caricatures almost by nature have an inherent "critical" attribute. This leads to the (often simplified) conclusion that the use of caricatures in the classroom thus almost automatically leads to an ability for critical analysis on the part of the pupils.

This view can be countered by the notion that caricatures, circumstances, or situations are often schematically reproduced. When images are reproduced the same way over and over, i.e. when they are constantly typified, this can lead to the manifestation of clichés and prejudices.

However, if the teacher has knowledge about the proper interpretation of caricatures, a differentiated understanding of historical-political contexts, possesses and applies the right kinds of knowledge and methods, and in turn uses them to convey these contents to the pupils, caricatures become appropriate for use in the classroom.

When it comes to caricatures dealing with the life of women and men in times of political and societal change, the pupils can benefit from them by obtaining an increased sensitivity towards different images of men and women. The topic can also be useful for critically reflecting upon their own notions of gender roles, as well as the gender roles perceived by society.

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