

Grimmelshausen's Landstörtzerin Courasche

Like Frau Welt.

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this essay is to describe the role of Courage –the female protagonist of 'Die Landstörtzerin Courasche' (1669) by Grimmelshausen - as the incarnation of Frau Welt, as was suggested by Feldges, in order to bring out the complexity of a literary character whose (female) image was made up of the usual misogynistic stereotypes of Grimmelshausen's historical and cultural context. Despite being depicted as a modern Frau Welt, Courage cannot escape her destiny of subordination to men and essentially acts as a deterrent character, thus embodying the misogynistic stereotypes of the time.

KEYWORDS - Frau Welt, Grimmelshausen, Landstörtzerin Courasche, Misogynistic stereotypes

I. INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the second part of *Wunderbarliches Vogel-Nest* (1675), Grimmelshausen specifies that all the works that make up the series of *simplicianischen Schriften* (Breuer, 1999: 27-114 [1]) are connected and 'they would be poorly understood without such connection' (*Das wunderbarliche Vogel-Nest*: 150 [2]). Excluding her picaresque autobiography (Büchler, 1971: 12-42 [3]), Courage appears only twice more within the series: the first time in the fifth book of *Simplicissimus*, the second in the *Springinsfeld*.

When the heroine is shown for the first time, her reputation is immediately compromised: Simplicius, the man with whom she had a fleeting love encounter, describes her as "mehr mobilis als nobilis" (*Simplicissimus*: 407 [4]). And it would be exactly because of Simplicio's not very edifying allusion that Courage decided to get revenge for the man's arrogance (*Courasche*: 131 [5]).

Nevertheless, Mathias Feldges's insight, e.g. the revenge motivation doesn't justify alone Courage's connection with the whole series, is understandable: the novel, Feldges argues, 'can be understood without having read Grimmelshausen's other books' (Feldges, 1969: 37-40 [6]).

The aim of this essay is to describe the role of Courage as the incarnation of Frau Welt, as was suggested by Feldges, in order to bring out the complexity of a literary character whose (female) image was made up of the usual misogynistic stereotypes of Grimmelshausen's historical and cultural context.

II. COURAGE LIKE FRAU WELT

According to Feldges, Frau Welt embodies two different ideas about women which coexisted from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period: alongside the beautiful but deceptive lady, there was in fact the idea of a demonic woman (Feldges: 81-82 [6]). However, the image of Frau Welt is not static. It always adapts to the spirit of the time, thus effectively personifying the transience of life and the danger of reaching eternal damnation by following false worldly values (Stammler, 1959 [7]). The different values associated with Frau

Welt's allegory and typical in Courage make her a complex and negative character. Like in Frau Welt, the aspect that most characterizes the *picara* Courage is lust. Grimmelshausen depicts her as a woman who has never been able to rationally control her sexuality since her early adolescence and therefore gives in to her carnal desires.

Disguised as a young servant, still thirteen and clumsy in affairs of the heart, Lebuschka does not reveal her feelings to her lover until her senses can resist. When Lebuschka 'becomes' a woman, there are two levels of narration, referring to her rational and instinctual part, respectively. On the one hand, the girl is tempted to declare herself to satisfy her instincts but feels inadequate and fail to reveal herself; on the other hand, her overwhelming physical and impulsive character will eventually invade her rationality and make her give in. A young inexperienced girl would be held back by modesty and shyness. Courage is not. Her exuberant physicality prevails over her rational part or, perhaps, at least reasonable: Lebuschka is seduced by the physical appearance of the captain, and every hint of the beauty and seductive virility of the lover is intended to justify the purely physical and almost physiological need to satisfy a sexual appetite which she does not know and does not want to resist. The promise of marriage extorted from the *Rittmeister* is nothing more than a pretense of false decency: in truth, she has no regrets for the loss of her virginity and she is aware that the captain would have given anything not to marry. The heroine is not at all the virgin tempted and seduced by the flattery or insistent requests of a man. Her inordinate passion is rather a symptom of a corrupt and lascivious soul that reveals the perverse and libidinous appetite of the woman, as the 'Dame von Babylon' (Kelletat, 1958: 817 [8]).

Another aspect that brings the character of Courage closer to the depiction of Frau Welt is the art of simulation. Courage's most innocent and harmless artifices is the aesthetic. Grimmelshausen introduces her as a young widow in Vienna with an old procuress who teaches her all sorts of tricks to enhance her qualities and appear even more seductive. Once again, great importance is associated with make-up as Courage learns its secrets at a particular moment of her life: Grimmelshausen describes a widow who is wickedly aware of the particular beauty of mourning dresses and takes the opportunity to bring out her appeal by the color contrast. Although desolate in public, the widow is shown in her private space while learning to put make-up on to make her skin whiter and her golden hair brighter and listening to the advice of those who are more experienced than her in certain topics. Make-up is significant in her life because it proves to be a precious ally. As in the episode in Sauerbrunnen with Simplicio, make-up is not only the innocent desire to improve one's outward appearance. Powders, creams and ointments hide a corrupt and sick nature above all. Although Courage still proves desirable and attractive at an older age, she is in fact affected by syphilis.

The contrast between external beauty and internal decay is obviously comparable to that of Frau Welt, extremely seductive but corrupt, wormy, and rotten at heart. Only at the end of her autobiographical 'confession', Grimmelshausen will show us a Courage that, isolated with the gypsy gang from the community, will finally stop hiding behind make-up. As a leader of the gypsies, Courage will no longer need pretenses and will freely lie, steal, and cheat: after a life of deception, she will finally drop the mask and show her true nature, her skin dyed with the color that is normally attributed to the devil (*Courasche*: 124[5]).

Courage immediately learns from the old woman that make-up is not enough to seduce men. Courage is educated about fashion and practices in front of the mirror in search of the most varied attitudes that can make her appear seductive and intriguing (*Courasche*: 29[5]). The old woman's artifices were very effective as Courage's stay in Vienna will prove. Courage will socially simulate a chaste and modest behavior, she behaves like the most pious and devout of women, she assiduously and regularly goes to church – the only public place she goes to – and spends her days doing housework, while she is being secretly educated at the old woman's school. This is obviously the typical baroque contrast between essence and appearance. Courage is here an extremely virtuous woman and even more seductive and desirable because she is inaccessible. The consequences of her attitude will soon be evident, and she meets, or she is introduced to countless men with whom she can satisfy all her repressed desires.

Like Frau Welt, Courage shows her true face and her true essence when she has reached her goal: once the unsuspecting prey has been induced to satisfy her desires, the woman takes off her mask, abandons all hypocrisy and finally gives vent to her true nature. Courage indulges an immoderate nymphomaniac impulse, reaching the lowest levels of depravity to appease her insatiable cravings, as already happened with the captain. And beyond the real economic needs that could push a woman into prostitution (Arnold, 1980: 86-111 [9]), Courage enjoys her sinful relationships libidinally and perversely. The woman does not regret her behavior at all, but rather tries to make the most of the youth and lovers, as a couple of popular verses reminds her (*Courasche*: 32[5]).

Even the sexuality of this woman is doubly deceptive: her sterile body can only seduce, but it will never be able to generate, it is a body that can only offer nothing beyond sexual satisfaction. Courage is Frau Welt, who makes her appearance delightful to let her chosen prey fall into her net, but she can offer nothing but eternal damnation. And the case of Saltincampo represents an exemplary deterrent for every reader. The man is infatuated with Courage, whom he considers as a goddess. However, he gradually loses all dignity and lives in a sinful state, satisfying his own carnal pleasures and accumulating money in large quantities. He lets himself be indoctrinated by his partner and carries out the most sinister actions until he reaches damnation (*Courasche*: 88[5]). The analogy with Frau Welt is once again evident. The woman embodies the sin and sinfulness of the world. Her looks can deceive the fool into believing that the fleeting values of the world alone are enough for them to be happy, but ultimately lead them to eternal damnation instead.

The woman is soon identified with the devil. With false flattery, she leads men astray and to perdition. Alongside the courteous representation of Frau Welt, Feldges confirms that there is in fact a second image that was widespread in the Middle Ages: Frau Welt as a devil-woman. Both representations coexisted, sometimes overlapping, and losing outlines, until the Baroque period, when they had their last literary fortune with Abraham in Sancta Clara (Feldges, 1969: 81-82 [6]). It is therefore interesting to investigate when and for what reason Courage is compared to evil or a creature that acts with the aid of magical arts and with the alleged collaboration of the occult. Being a woman and wanting to accuse her of plotting deceptions and all sorts of devilry, Courage is often referred to as a “witch”.

The witch-woman association enjoyed a fortunate diffusion during the cultural period in which the novel was written. A similar belief was certainly deeply rooted in the collective imagination as it is clear from the many treatises that Battafarano quotes in his essay on the baroque typology of female negativity (Battafarano, 1995: 245-246 [10]). However, there is always an antecedent episode in which the commonly accepted principles are subverted or challenged by Courage’s anomalous role, whenever she is directly named ‘she-devil’ or accused of witchcraft. The first time that Courage is defined as a witch and associated with the Devil is when she proves to be braver and bolder than a man in battle (*Courasche*: 43[5]): If Courage had simply been a woman, she would never have been able to prove to be superior to a man, especially in battle, while with the help of magic or supernatural powers, the woman can even take off a soldier’s head and take prisoner and humiliate a major. The major is not the only one to define her like this – to compensate for his offended pride as a man and as a soldier – but also the entire regiment seeks an explanation for the anomalous strength and courage of a woman with devilish and thus supernatural attributes. In this uncomfortable situation, Courage is even forced to abandon the regiment and the war. Courage is a woman who has shown to everyone a value which is far superior to that of a man’s and her situation is critical not only within her regiment but throughout all the *armada* (*Courasche*: 45[5]). The position of the *picara* provided by Jean-Daniel Krebs, a woman who must deal with the ferocity of a world governed by the rules made by men (Krebs, 1989: 239-252 [11]). Judging the unnatural qualities of a woman who behaves like a man would therefore seem the most instinctive reaction of a man when wanting to restore the socio-cultural order.

To legitimize the extraordinary strength, audacity, courage and resourcefulness of a woman in battle, she is judged to be a ‘half demon’, while the most effective way to weaken her and make her vulnerable and

prosecutable according to earthly laws is however to accuse her of witchcraft. With an accusation of witchcraft without any reason, men can make prosecutable any woman who, with an insolent and irreverent behaviour, has dared to challenge male authority: the accusation can act, alone, as a normative phenomenon, while the threat of undergoing a possible trial for witchcraft is sometimes enough for the accused to comply with the recommended conduct and lose all libertarian ambitions. For example, Courage forces herself to suffer group violence (Feldman, 1991: 61-80 [12]). In the twelfth chapter, the major that the woman had taken prisoner takes advantage of the events – it was a critical moment for Courage’s army – and captures her in turn, and accuses her of witchcraft (*Courasche*: 57[5]), and having become aware of her widowed condition, as well as her greater vulnerability, the major decides to take revenge as a soldier and as a man. His intentions are clear already when he threatens her, calling her a ‘bloody witch’ (*Courasche*: 56[5]) and making her understand how she must be punished because she dared to challenge a man. On the other hand, Courage seems aware of having broken a code: her reaction is not an instinctive rebellion, since the woman seem to be aware of her own guilt and accepts to be punished (*Courasche*: 57-58[5]). Violence becomes extreme here (*Courasche*: 57[5]). The soldiers, not content with having already sufficiently injured the femininity of Courage, further humiliate her by raping her in turn. If only the accusation of witchcraft had not led to harmful consequences even for those who had lain with a witch, these men would have certainly made it public (*Courasche*: 58[5]).

The confrontation with the Devil in person is proposed by Courage herself just before marrying Saltincampo. When the man-woman role is once again subverted, Courage seems to be intentionally ‘diabolic’ to achieve her own ends and it is herself who nominates the devil as a teacher (*Courasche*: 74[5]). Even Courage compares herself to the devil at the end of her daring narrative (*Courasche*: 124[5]). Although the bond with the devil seems superficial, it is also true that Courage will no longer have to use a thousand tricks to hide her true nature. She will now take off her mask and show her authentic face.

III. CONCLUSION

Courage fully covers the two aspects of Frau Welt. On the one hand, she is extremely charming and seductive but fatally deceptive. On the other hand, she is a devil-woman, she essentially acts as a deterrent character, thus embodying the misogynistic stereotypes of the time. In a world governed by men’s rules, the woman who escapes the role commonly entrusted to her, forces man to question himself, and thus she becomes a threat. Courage, who embodies the vanity of the world, the falsity of worldly values and the deceit of earthly seductions, is an antisocial heroine who breaks and subverts the rules of ‘normal’ society. Despite being depicted as a modern Frau Welt, Courage cannot escape her destiny of subordination to men: in the margins of a society in which she has never fully integrated and whose rules she has openly challenged by overriding the will of men, she can finally truly be herself, stop every artifice, not dissemble, but simply be a woman and be chosen by a man to become his wife. After a life as a notorious thief, a vagabond, as well as a lustful woman interested in seducing her victims to lead them to death or damnation, Courage will be herself subject to universally shared patriarchal rules, adapting her identity to the sociocultural expectations of the readers.

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